

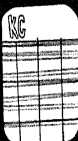
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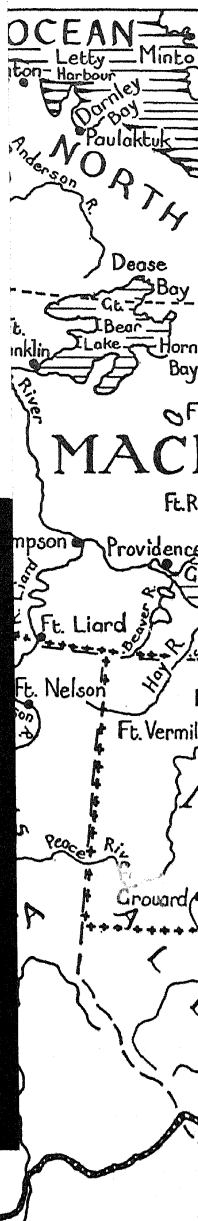


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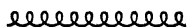
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BISHOP OF THE WINDS

Bishop of the Winds

FIFTY YEARS IN THE ARCTIC REGIONS



By

GABRIEL BREYNAT

O.M.I.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

ALAN GORDON SMITH

P. J. KENEDY & SONS

New York

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IN DEEP AND AFFECTIONATE GRATITUDE
TO ALL MY MISSIONARIES
BROTHERS AND FATHERS
OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE
AND THE SISTERS OF CHARITY (GREY SISTERS)
OF MONTREAL

INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK retraces the happenings of fifty active years that earned for this humble missionary the successive titles of "the Bishop of the Winds" and "the Flying Bishop." I have written it at the solicitation of Father Théodore Labouré, the late Superior General of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to which was joined that of many of my friends in France and Canada.

I had good reason to hesitate. While I was living with the Caribou Eaters, I set my hand to the oar, whip, axe, or the handle of a frying pan, far more often than I did to a pen. I could have become a good canoer, fisherman or cook, or a trainer and driver of dogs. . . . Even when I was made a bishop, I spent my time in travel, constantly visiting all my missions. None of these occupations are exactly a preparation for the craft of letters.

However, I undertook the task, and here is the result. The first part of the book, "Among the Caribou Eaters," recounts the life of an ordinary missionary of Fond du Lac, Athabasca. The second introduces "A Traveler for Christ" and describes new foundations and the development of the Catholic missions in the vast territory of the Mackenzie. The third contains the account of various foundations in Eskimo country and the adventures of "the Flying Bishop."

As far as the first part is concerned, it is as well to remember that it describes facts and manners of forty or fifty years ago. So great are the changes which have taken place since, that tourists returning from the Far North seem almost tempted to resent the progress that has come about. Our young missionaries, too, with their enthusiasm kindled by the enthralling works of Father Duchaussois, one of our Congregation, confess to a

feeling of slight disappointment at the comparative comfort they now find in our missions, even though these were classed by Pius XI as some of the "most difficult." But it is not long before they realize that in spite of the amenities introduced by civilization, the many hardships and occasions for self-sacrifice — sometimes heroic self-sacrifice — would soon discourage them if they could not regularly draw strength and courage and perseverance from their close union with the great Victim of the Eucharist.

Weather conditions will always remain the same. So will a temperature that may descend to forty, fifty, or even sixty degrees below zero. Yes, the cold is just as biting and intense, especially if there is a little wind from the north, as it was fifty years ago. The enormous distances to travel will always be the same. The dogsled and the snowshoe are still, and will long remain, the only practical means of answering a sick call two or three days away from the mission, or of visiting encampments right on the borders of Barren Land. It will still often be necessary to sleep out in the open, sometimes on an ice-covered lake, when a blinding snowstorm makes it dangerous to go on. In spite of great improvements, life in native encampments is far from offering the visitor the comfort, the cuisine or the cleanliness he might wish. There are always the languages to learn, and there is the rather thankless ministry among these poor folk who have to be protected from the vices brought in the wake of civilization.

No, there is no reason to resent modern progress, so long as we remember that our civilization is, and must necessarily be, founded on Christ. It is of him the Psalmist said: "Vain is the builder's toil, if the house is not of the Lord's building." It is this task of building that the missionary must be about. Sent by Christ with a divine message to souls, he has to preach love and justice and peace. His one aim must be the safeguarding of the kingdom of God in men's hearts and the extension of that kingdom throughout the nations of the world.

✠ G. BREYNAT

Oblate of Mary Immaculate

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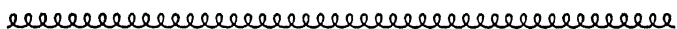
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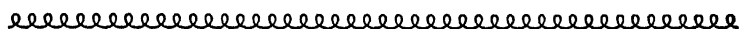
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I



AMONG THE CARIBOU EATERS

I: *Off to the Mackenzie* *The Land of the Caribou Eaters*



IT WAS THE EVENING of April 2, 1892. At the Gare St. Lazare, in Paris, fourteen young priests, under the smiling supervision of an older, bearded cleric, whose face showed unmistakable signs of many years of exposure to the roughest weather, were hurrying down the railroad platform to the Dieppe train.

As they struggled along with their luggage of every size and shape, they chattered and gesticulated excitedly but happily in the typical manner of youth setting out on a great adventure. From a distance, their black garb made it almost impossible to distinguish between them, with the exception of one among them who was particularly noticeable for his smallness of stature and who seemed even more excited than his companions.

The older man with the weather-stained face was Bishop Emile Grouard of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who had come to France some months earlier to gather recruits for missionary work among the Indians and Eskimos of the Canadian Northwest. The particularly small and excited young recruit was myself, Gabriel Breynat, and the journey on which I had now embarked was the realization of a boyhood dream.

At Dieppe, all fifteen of us boarded the channel steamer for southern England from which we eventually made our way to London and thence by train to Liverpool. After a short stay there, we sailed on *The Mongolian* which measured six hundred feet in length and carried nine hundred passengers of every European nationality, most of them going to seek their fortunes in the New World.

The only other clergymen aboard were two Anglican bishops.

One of these, from Toronto, kept aloof throughout the voyage; the other, a New Zealander, was more sociable, and very generously offered us a novel by Zola to while away our leisure hours.

On April 14 we met heavy weather in the approaches to Newfoundland; but on the 16th, we disembarked safely at Halifax, and thirty-five hours later arrived by train in Montreal. There, we made our way to the Oblate house in the Rue Visitation, one of the poorest quarters of the city. The Fathers received us warmly and one of them took us on a tour of the churches, main streets and shops.

All of us were particularly curious to see the descendants of the terrible Iroquois, tales of whose exploits—at the time Montreal was founded—had excited our imaginations. But we were somewhat disillusioned on entering Caughnawaga to meet people who, though their features and complexion certainly suggested an origin more or less “native,” had been transformed by civilization and still more by religion. They seemed pleased to talk to us—in good French, incidentally—and it was hard to imagine that their ancestors had spread so much terror among the earliest settlers of Ville-Marie.

When the bell rang for Vespers I was invited to officiate. By a special privilege the Iroquois language is authorized for the liturgical offices, and all I had to do was to intone the *Deus in adjutorium*, in Iroquois. So I began in my best voice: *Niio askënikonhrarake, askienawase . . .*

Our Iroquois friends seemed to understand perfectly, for hundreds of vibrant voices responded: *Sewenniiio sastoron askiatakënnha . . .* or, as it is in Latin: *Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina.*

Going on to Ottawa, we were welcomed with similar kindness and goodwill at the St. Joseph Scholasticate. Besides this scholasticate, the Oblates now have in the Canadian capital a preparatory seminary; they also have charge of the fine big church of St. Joseph, and conduct a university which was founded by a fellow-countryman, Father Tabaret, O.M.I. At the time of our visit, a statue of the latter had already been erected, and stood at the entrance to the University.

I was invited to sing the Mass. Afterwards, the superior, Bishop Duhamel, paid me the dubious compliment of saying: "What a weak voice you have, Father! You'll never be able to stand the missions."

Sixty years have since elapsed, and my voice is no stronger.

To Edmonton from Montreal took a week by rail. Traveling on the Canadian Pacific line, we crossed enormous empty solitudes for hundreds of miles on end. Very occasionally, at the foot of a hill or beside a lake, a small log cabin betrayed the presence of man. The rest was terrifying in its wildness. Yet all this had undoubted beauty and grandeur and preserved, better than our European lands, the imprint of God's power. Here vastness succeeded vastness: lakes, forests, prairies. For two whole days we steamed through forests, for three days more across the prairies. And there were lakes everywhere, wide enough to be veritable inland seas. The largest was Lake Superior, beside which we ran all one day. It was still largely covered with snow and ice, but its shores were magnificent. Spectacular views, the most various and picturesque imaginable, succeeded one another for more than four hundred miles.

From St. Boniface to Regina the land was as flat and uniform as a billiard table. Further on, towards Calgary, it became gently undulating. The prairie had nothing to offer but a monotonous view of yellowing grass. But sometimes there was an Indian wigwam to be seen, or a little herd of antelopes, running free in the wilderness. Railway stations were very few. After all, what is the good of stations in a wilderness?

On the sites of future stations there were heaps of buffalo bones, collected on the prairies for transportation to refineries back East. Here and there, somewhat wild-looking Indians came to admire our smoking engine and the great "houses on wheels" full of white people. They were comparing them, no doubt, with their own carts and sleds.

What strange beings they were, with long flowing hair, striped blankets on their backs and others held by a cord about their loins, and all proudly wearing headdresses of buffalo horns!

The squaws had their arms covered with thick copper bracelets and wore earrings of roughly fashioned stone or metal.

On May 15 we arrived at Calgary, at the foot of the Rockies which could be seen looming up on the distant horizon. Here we were welcomed by the legendary Father André and Father Leduc. No one could have been kinder or more charmingly simple than these founders of our missions in the West.

Foreseeing a prosperous future for Calgary, following the completion of the Canadian Pacific, they had built there a magnificent stone church, which required only a bishop in order to take its place with honor beside the two cathedrals already standing in the West. It had been solemnly opened on December 8, 1889.

Other than the church (the future cathedral), the most imposing building was the prison. Father André himself conducted us through it, for this was his special domain. We found it almost empty except for a few métis (or half-breed) Indians, most of whom were there for illegally obtaining liquor from the whites who preyed upon them.

Early on the 16th we entrained again, this time for Edmonton, or rather Strathcona which has since become a part of the city of Edmonton. This section of the line had been completed less than a year before, in August, 1891, and its roadbed was still very far from being safe. Hence it took us the whole day to reach our destination.

The station and terminus of the line was still south of the Saskatchewan River. We crossed the latter by a fairly primitive ferry and eventually found ourselves at the house of Father Fouquet, a mere shanty made of planks and obviously far too small to lodge us all. So, with the exception of Father Dupé, we had to pursue our way to St. Albert.

On our arrival, we were delighted to receive a cordial welcome and a paternal blessing from none other than "the holy Monseigneur Grandin"¹ who has been made famous as "*l'évêque pouilleux*" by the writer Louis Veuillot. In all, we spent ten good days with him, returning occasionally to Edmonton.

¹ Died June 3, 1902. His cause has been introduced at Rome.

At that time Edmonton was still a small village, with its streets only roughly marked out. As a provisioning center for the trappers and traders of the Far North, it offered to newcomers, settling on the neighboring rich lands, the choice of three general stores for their supplies: Hudson's Bay, Larue & Picard and MacDougall & Sicord. A fourth, Ross Brothers, furnished iron and other hardware.

At Edmonton had been established the first "registration office" for homesteads or grants of land. The town still echoed with the epic struggles waged by the population against the Canadian Pacific Railway, which since August, 1891, had linked Edmonton with Calgary. The directors of the C.P.R. had wanted to transfer the registration office south of the Saskatchewan, and make Strathcona (the terminus of the line) the future capital of Alberta. The people of Edmonton were still boasting of their victory.

On May 27 four heavy wagons awaited us at the doors of Larue & Picard. Into them were piled boxes and packages of every shape and composition, containing a year's provisions for the missionaries of the North. Our personal baggage completed the load and off we went, across prairies and forests, over mountains and through valleys, by roads alternately sandy and muddy. But gradually, we drew nearer our goal, Tawattinna on the Athabasca, the end of the road from Edmonton, and the port of embarkation for the North.²

A journey under such conditions could not help being eventful. Sometimes the horses broke their traces, sometimes a wheel detached itself from a wagon and rolled off into the prairie; one day a guide fell off his seat headfirst into a peat bog. It might have cost him his life, but he got off with a good scrubbing, for the peat had made him as black as a chimney sweep.

On another occasion when breaking camp we found we were two horses short. We spent all the day searching, and night was falling before we eventually found them. I should explain that

² The road between Edmonton and Athabasca Landing (Tawattinna) was opened by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1887.

because our load was already too heavy, we had brought no fodder for the horses on the journey—neither hay nor oats. The poor beasts, after hauling the wagons all day, had to graze where they could and get their water from lake or river, or even a swamp. The traveler arriving today by train or car at Athabasca Landing can hardly imagine the hazards and difficulties which the journey presented sixty years ago.

After five long days, halting at midday for dinner and in the evening camping in the open, we reached the banks of the Athabasca River. A village was being built there, consisting of huts rather than houses. Trees from the neighboring forest had provided Father Husson, one of our Oblates, with the material for a small shed where provisions were stored for the missions of the North.

At Tawattinna we were greatly cheered by rejoining Bishop Grouard. Traveling in a lighter, if no more comfortable, wagon, he had arrived a little before us, accompanied by a Grey Nun, Sister Pinsonneault, who was just out of the novitiate and on her way to the Indian school at Chipewyan.

But we soon had to separate. One of us, Father Dupé, was to accompany Bishop Grouard to the St. Bernard mission on Lesser Slave Lake, and I, with no experience, was to lead the party detailed for the missions on Lake Athabasca. With me came Father Gouy, recently ordained at Ottawa, Brothers Michel, Hoyer, Eauclaire and Lavoie, and Sister Pinsonneault.

Our guide was a métis, Louison Fosseneuve, commonly called Shot, who was more than zealous in taking care of us, both on the boat and when we camped for the night. Most helpful too was Brother Lavoie, an experienced traveler who had an eye for everything. He showed us how to pitch our tent, initiated us into the secrets of elementary cooking (with lard, rice and beans), taught us how to mix flour with the cold, muddy water from the river, and then cook the paste, such as it was, in a frying pan over a great fire.

Our barges, being open to sun, rain, and winds, were most uncomfortable. They were just barges—forty-five to fifty feet

long—flat-bottomed and rectangular, slightly curved fore and aft, and propelled by enormous oars—complete spruce trees—made at the landing stage and destined, at the end of the voyage, to be used for building. At that time two of these barges were enough to transport all the necessary supplies for the two districts of Athabasca and Mackenzie.

We had only one mishap to record. At our final camp we were clumsy enough to set fire to the forest. The flames leaped from branch to branch, and from tree to tree; a regular inferno, but a magnificent sight all the same.

"Lucky for you there are no police about," laughed one of our crew.

The smoke—or *boucane* as our people called it—could still be seen in the distance when our attention was arrested by a noise like the grumbling of thunder which got louder and louder the further we went. We were approaching the rapids!

At this point, the Athabasca River looked at least as wide and deep as the Rhône. On either side overhanging rocks more than one hundred feet high seemed on the point of crashing down on us, and in the middle of the river, just ahead of us, stood an island intercepting the rushing waters and separating them into two turbulent streams which bounded past the full length of the island's rocky sides.

At the head of this island, the barges, deftly guided by our pilot through jutting boulders, came to a halt and we put our baggage and supplies ashore, to be portaged to the opposite end by means of a primitive tramway constructed by the Hudson's Bay Company. Only our huge steam boiler, by reason of its great weight, was left on one of the barges which now had to ride the rapids. Father Gouy and I elected to remain aboard, and as the craft hurtled along, our terror was swallowed up in admiration for the pilot's skill in guiding us through the hazardous waters which flung themselves, boiling and raging, from rock to rock.

When we reached the foot of the island, the same astonishing skill and marvelous endurance of our pilot and rowers was again displayed as they reloaded the boats with their respective cargoes

while huge waves, caused by the rejoining of the waters, crashed together on all sides. After this we had little difficulty in riding the remaining rapids that succeeded one another for eighty miles to Fort McMurray.

Now a pretty little village, Fort McMurray was then merely a halting post with only one building, a hangar belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company. We stopped only to put ashore the boatmen whom we no longer needed. From there on two men and a steersman for each boat were enough to keep us in the stream. We had only to drift with the current. After the adventure of the rapids, and in spite of the beautiful scenery, nothing could have been more monotonous.

In four or five days we reached the entrance to Lake Athabasca. Game was abundant, and three good meals of wild duck put us in very good humor.

On June 15 we reached the Nativity mission⁸ where we were welcomed by Father Le Doussal, the superior, and all the community. There were a number of Indians there too, with beaming faces, the squaws carrying their papooses in their arms.

After a visit to the church and a little brushup, we heard the refectory bell. The Sister-cook apologized for not having had time to prepare anything extra, but promised to serve on the following day a dessert she made for feast days: a tart of local raspberries. Meanwhile we made do with the following menu:

Barley soup, à l'eau pure

The barley was grown locally and summarily husked with a pestle by the aged Brother Scheers who hummed Flemish airs to himself as he worked.

Roast duck (one each)

Potatoes boiled "en robe de chambre"

Coffee made of barley (without sugar)

N.B. As much as we wanted of every item.

⁸ We had left Edmonton on May 17, so we had been traveling nearly a month. In 1937 I made the same trip by air in our Blue Bird, the *Sancta Maria*; it took only three hours. On that occasion as we drew near the Athabasca rapids, I asked our pilot, Louis Bisson, to drop to a few hundred feet. The water was low in the river, and I felt that only madmen — mad for souls or furs — could have risked their lives in such frail craft among all those rocks and boiling waters.

Next day, in addition to the promised tart, we were to have two lumps of sugar each, which was a Sunday's ration. The supper menu consisted of dried fish, potatoes, barley coffee and *galettes* (one each). Again, as much as we wanted of everything—except the *galette* or cake. This latter took the place of both soup and sweet. Hardly bigger than a fifty-cent piece, it was an inch or an inch and a half thick, depending on the cook's success in getting the batter to rise.

For breakfast, there was *copieuse fricassée*, a mixture of boiled fish and mashed potatoes to which a little water had been added by way of condiment, and the whole baked in the oven. The barley coffee made its usual appearance, and there was a *galette* with a tiny portion of butter or some caribou fat.

Such was our daily bill of fare throughout our stay at the Nativity mission. When the fishing was good, an excellent fresh fish replaced the dried variety, and when game was scarce, it replaced the duck. It also improved the morning fricassee which thereby lost the smoky taste given it by the dried fish.

Often brent-geese, grey or white geese, or dried meat from Fond du Lac brought a welcome change in the menu. On Sundays, corn starch with milk, and rice with a few raisins or pieces of fried apple floating in it, would alternate as desserts.

At the beginning of July, our Father Lecomte arrived from the St. Raphael mission at Fort Liard. He was suffering from a complaint that required an urgent operation and was on his way to Holy Cross hospital at Calgary, six hundred miles away. The Father Superior asked me to accompany the sick priest, who was much beloved, to the head of the great rapids.

From Fort Chipewyan to Fort McMurray we encountered no difficulties, but from there to the great rapids it was very hard traveling in a barge open to wind and weather, heat, cold, rain—and plagues of mosquitoes. We had no medical supplies and the food was poor: flour, dried meat and fish, smoked bacon, rice and tea.

I made up a bed as best I could amid the baggage and a sorry bed it was—a musk ox hide, with a few blankets spread out

over a large chest—and for eight long days! Finally we safely reached the steamer *Athabasca*, which was to carry Father Leconte to Athabasca Landing. But he was to die before reaching the hospital at Calgary.

I rejoined the Nativity mission, only to leave very shortly for my post, the solitude of Fond du Lac, in company with Father de Chambeuil, my new superior. It was a week's sailing. Our barge—of the old "yock boat" type—short and tubby but pointed at both ends, was provided with four stout rowers and a boatswain, in the person of Germain Mercredi, son of the factor Joseph Mercredi—"factor" being the title of the man in charge of a Hudson's Bay Company post. Joseph himself sat in the bow, kept a lookout for reefs, and was willing on occasion to give a hand to the rowers.

We rowed and sailed by turns. Sometimes we were held up when the head wind was too strong. The men then used the time in fishing with net or hook. The whitefish and salmon they caught made a welcome change in our diet, which consisted almost entirely of dried meat and pemican, the latter a kind of pressed meat mixed with fat.

At the crack of dawn, whenever the weather was favorable for sailing or rowing, a menacing "Wake up! Wake up!" would startle us from sleep. There would be a rush to pack up and we were off immediately without waiting for any breakfast. After three or four spells of an hour's rowing each, we stopped for a meal.

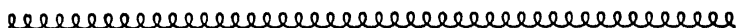
When the boatmen had had an hour's rowing against the wind they were allowed to rest and smoke a pipe in the lee of some promontory or island. One day we had just tied up at "the Strait of the Dead" when, out of consideration, I am sure, for the wretched rowers who had been laboring harder than usual, Germain leaped ashore and set about collecting wood for the fire. But he had neglected to await the order from the pilot, his father; and this earned him a stinging reproof.

"That is just the way to spoil these savages," shouted old Mercredi, angrily. "Get on board and push off."

There was an icy silence among the rowers, and without a word, Germain climbed aboard and took his seat forward. At the next rest period, he stayed where he was and declined to eat. In fact he ate nothing more till we reached our destination. It was his only means of teaching his father a lesson.

That evening we completed our voyage. Here I was at last among the "Caribou Eaters." *Deo gratias!*

2: "The New Little Praying Man"



SEEING ME on the Company's barge beside Father de Chambeuil, one of the Caribou Eaters who had come to meet us cried out: "Yalt'yi gozh azé sin!" — "There's the new Praying Man!" The name has stuck to me ever since.

After the usual hearty handshakes we hastened to the chapel-house, only a few yards away, where we had a brief cleanup, and then proceeded to the kitchen. The trip had made us ravenous.

While I set to work, rather clumsily, cleaning the first trout I had ever handled, my superior, Father de Chambeuil, took a candle made of caribou grease and sliced a few chips of it into the frying pan.

"I've no other fat," he explained, seeing my look of consternation, "but it's quite clean." So, French fashion, we made it palatable with a little altar wine.

Such was my first meal among the Caribou Eaters: a fine salmon trout fried in caribou fat, washed down with dregs of a bottle of wine which had been uncorked three months earlier; no vegetables, no bread.

Perhaps this is as good a place as any to say a few words about my earlier life.

I was born on the feast of St. Bruno, October 6, 1867, at Saint-Vallier-sur-Rhône, in the department of Drôme, and five days later was baptized Gabriel Joseph Elias Breynat. My parents' station in life was very modest. Antoine, my father, was a simple postman, and my mother, Philomène Lara, worked as a dress-maker whenever she could spare the time from her household

chores and the care of her children. Both were excellent Catholics, although, as was the case with too many French families at that time, their piety was somewhat tinged with Jansenism.

Of my parents' four children, Joseph the eldest became curé of the neighboring parish of Serves where he died on December 19, 1919. My sister Marie, eighteen months younger than I, wished to become a Carmelite, but instead unselfishly devoted her short life of twenty-four years to our parents. A third son, Louis, died a few months after his birth.

My education was first entrusted to the Sisters of St. Joseph in their kindergarten, then to the Brothers of the Christian Schools where I made my First Communion on May 11, 1878. However, in 1880, when the fanatical Jules Ferry pushed through the anti-clerical laws, the municipality of Saint-Vallier expelled the Brothers and confiscated their school. Fortunately, the Marist Brothers' school at Sarras, just across the Rhône from Saint-Vallier, was allowed to remain open, and with a next-door neighbor of my own age, I attended this until the summer holidays of 1880.

It was in August of that year that I had a dream that first set my feet on the path that was to take me to the wilderness of the Canadian Northwest. In this dream a beautiful lady told me to join my brother in the seminary, and said that one day I would go very far away. From that moment I never doubted my vocation.

After a few lessons in Latin from one of the parish priests, it was arranged, through the generosity of a local nobleman, Count La Sizerane, that I attend the preparatory seminary at Valence. It was there, at a retreat given by Father Lavillardière, the future Superior General of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, that I decided to become a missionary.

However, the path that led to the realization of my dream was now strewn with obstacles. My parents objected, the diocesan authorities insisted that I complete my baccalaureate first, and even after these and other difficulties had been resolved, the Congregation declared that my health was such that I was “unfit for

the hardships of the missions in the Far North." The *coup de grâce* was a letter from Bishop Grouard himself saying that he had very little hope of taking me with him.

Three days later, I received what I thought to be an ordinary summons from my director, Father Gandar. It can be imagined how great was my surprise and even greater my joy when he told me that the decision of the Congregation had been reversed and that I would be allowed to go to Mackenzie.

On February 21, 1892, I was ordained by Bishop Grouard, and on the 23rd, returned to Saint-Vallier where I sang the Mass with my brother Joseph as deacon, afterwards giving my blessing to my father and mother and a crowd of relatives and friends. The final parting came after a month's holiday spent at home. Fortunately, its pain was somewhat lessened by the thought of the reward promised to those who renounce this world for the love of God and the salvation of souls.

The mission of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows at Fond du Lac where I now found myself, so far away from the people, places and events I have just briefly described, had been founded by Father Henri Grollier who, in 1853, was the first missionary to visit the Caribou Eaters. In 1855 he had built a hut—27 by 17 feet—comprising a little sanctuary, hall, bedroom and kitchen, which was still standing when I arrived.

Father Albert Pascal took up his residence there in 1876. On his transfer in 1882 to the Nativity mission, he was replaced by Father de Chambeuil, whom I was to succeed in 1893. From September 1890, until April 1891, Father de Chambeuil had as companion Father Emile Grouard, later Bishop of Ibora and successor to Bishop Faraud as Vicar Apostolic of Athabasca-Mackenzie.

Great honor is due to those valiant pioneer missionaries to the vast solitudes of the "Great White Silence." Those of the older generation came to Canada from France at the request of the saintly Bishop Bourget, and disembarked at Montreal in 1842. In 1845 they had already spread as far as St. Boniface to help

Bishop Provencher, who may truly be called the founder of the Church in the Canadian West. As early as 1847, one of their first recruits, young Father Alexandre Taché, reached Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabasca. He opened the way for those I have mentioned, who after preaching the Gospel to the Caribou Eaters went off in pursuit of souls to the far North. Their precursor, Father Grollier, was to die in his prime near the Arctic Circle, after founding the mission of Our Lady of Hope. His last words were: “I die happy: I have seen the cross planted at the very ends of the earth.”

I myself have crossed these vast waters in all directions, from Hudson Bay to the borders of Alaska, from the south to the north as far as Victoria Land and Bank’s Land at the 72nd parallel. I have traveled by bark canoe, often having to make portages and to shoot rapids; I have made journeys on snowshoes and with teams of dogs, camping out in the open when the cold was intense, in woods or on icebound lakes; I have to my credit more than 200,000 miles by air, and flying over all this territory I have been better able to measure at a glance all the difficulties our first missionaries confronted so valiantly. I can, therefore, with just pride, pay homage to the spirit of faith and self-denial, the zeal in evangelizing souls, and the endurance and tenacity amid countless hardships that were displayed by these brave men at a time when steam engines and motors were wholly unknown in those remote parts.

It is true that in those days there was little baggage to hamper progress. Bishop Clut once traveled from the Nativity mission to Fond du Lac—at least 180 miles—on snowshoes, with his bedding on his back, behind the dogs of the chief factor, who had agreed to carry on his sled all the provisions Monseigneur needed on the journey—a little dried meat! For replenishment or variety of food, one had to rely on Providence, who feeds the swallows of the air and poor little sparrows, and to depend entirely on such game or fish as could be had by a lucky shot, a hook, a net, or even a rabbit snare.

When I arrived on the scene the completion of the railroad

from Calgary to Edmonton had made travel much easier. Free traders were opening stores in competition with those of the Hudson's Bay Company. Father de Chambeuil received an annual ration of a hundredweight of flour, a pittance he shared with an old squaw who repaired his moccasins; he also gave a pound or two to other Indians in exchange for their game or fish.

Bishop Grouard, on the strength of my arrival, added another hundredweight a year. But the other rations — twenty-five pounds each of rice, dried grapes for altar wine and dried apples — were not increased. Also there were six or seven pounds of butter, part of the produce of the little farm belonging to Nativity mission. In addition we had about a hundred pounds of sugar, out of which our personal ration, except when traveling or working outside, was four lumps a week. The rest had to be used to entice the caribou hunters and the natives to provide us with the maximum amount of dried meat, fat and pemican. This meat and fat, beyond what we absolutely needed, went to the Brothers of the Nativity mission for use during their heavy labors outside the mission. Dried meat, fat and pemican would be served to the Fathers and Sisters on Sundays and feast days, and were a special reward for the schoolchildren on holidays.

For trading purposes, to exchange for fresh or dried meat, we had received fifty pounds each of gunpowder and ordinary ball ammunition, twenty-five of bird shot, some files and knives, several axes, thread, needles, printed calico, flannel, a few shirts and several pairs of trousers.

The most pressing job facing Father de Chambeuil and myself was to patch up our house, and a dirty job it was. It consisted of plastering up the numerous holes, cavities or cracks caused by wind and rain with a kind of primitive mortar made mainly of clay and chopped hay. The four walls were constructed of logs, roughly squared and laid rather haphazardly one on top of the other. Similarly the roof was of plain logs stripped of bark and covered with the same mortar.

So we set to work. It involved nothing beyond my capacities.

Besides, I was working under the direction of a skilled master mason, Paul Azé.

Together we made the mortar in the local fashion, and applied it to the walls almost everywhere, but especially in badly damaged places. Our mortar retained its dampness long enough for us to do our work. Quickly it would freeze into a solid mass, and we would be provided with cover till wind and cold produced new cracks. When this happened we splashed the walls with a few pails of water which, when frozen, sealed all the new cracks, so that for a few weeks to come we were again provided with shelter.

Meanwhile autumn was upon us. This was the best time for laying in a store of fish and making sure of food for our dogs during the rest of the year. The first thing to see to was making ready our nets; then to prepare the floats. There was no cork for these so we used bits of wood which we pared down to the proper shape. Stones tied to a cord took the place of the usual lead sinker to anchor the nets.

On a calm evening we would take out a skiff to set the nets which, wind permitting, were inspected the following morning and each morning thereafter. Toward the end of the season, especially if the wind were in the north, the nets would freeze if kept too long out of water while we landed a pike, a trout or an ordinary loach which appeared to enjoy reducing our nets, floats, and other gear to a hopeless tangle. If, while unloading the nets, a fisherman's hands became covered with ice, he was forced to plunge them into the water to thaw them.

When we came ashore the first thing to do was to pierce the tail of each fish with a knife and string them on willow branches. Each branch bearing ten fish would then be hung on poles supported by stakes firmly embedded in the earth and sufficiently high off the ground to defy the efforts of the most ravenous dog. Fish skewered in this way were known as “stick-fish.” They were left exposed to the mercy of wind and rain, heat and cold. If caught toward the end of autumn, they usually kept quite well, and, being firmer, were sometimes preferred to fish recently

caught under the ice. Even when they were fairly high they would have to be put on the table if food was short. And we would be thankful too, to divine Providence for furnishing them. As for the dogs, they feasted on stick-fish until the next catch—if there was any left. And they thoroughly liked it, even preferring it to the fresh pike which we would casually throw them in summertime.

Fish for the table had to be caught under the first winter ice. There was no time to be lost, for this opportunity lasted only two or three weeks. Instead of a skiff we used the dogs to set the nets. The equipment, carefully prepared as for the autumn fishing, was loaded on to a sled. The same sled brought back the catch which, in a frozen state, was heaped haphazardly in a corner of the hangar where the cook could come and draw his supplies as he required them.

In winter fishing a round opening, about three feet in diameter, was pierced through the ice. During the first few days we used an ordinary hatchet for this; later it was necessary to use a well-sharpened heavy steel axe, with a long shaft. From the principal opening a line the length of the net would be laid out on the ice in the direction we wished to stretch the net. At the end of this line a second opening would be cut. With the net thus fixed in position at either end, the next step was to thread the line under the ice, using a pole as a needle. Between the two ends of the line extended on top of the ice, intermediate openings were cut, the distance between them being determined by the length of the pole. These openings had to be large enough to permit the little maneuver that followed.

The end of the line having been firmly tied to one end of the pole-needle, the latter was lowered under the ice through the first opening. With the aid of a fork-shaped piece of wood the needle was then slid along under the surface of the ice from one opening to the other. The fisherman's mate, with a wooden hook, would take hold of the pole-needle as it appeared at each opening in turn, and keep it in place until his companion came up with his fork and continued to work it along to the last opening.

We were now ready to spread the net which had been carefully

rolled in a piece of canvas, together with its floats and stones firmly tied. This was the trickiest part of the operation. The master-fisherman, having attached the net to the end of the line nearest him, would cast one of the sinkers into the water. This would carry with it the part of the net immediately attached to the stone, and the fisherman could then carefully drop the first float. The second sinker followed and also the second float, then the third, and so on until the last sinker and its float carried the net to its intended position at the other end of the line.

Naturally great care had to be taken to see that the sinkers, net and floats did not tangle. Meanwhile, at a signal, the fisherman's mate took hold of the far end of the line and drawing it gently after him, returned it to the principal opening. The net was now fully extended, and remained only to be firmly anchored. This was easy. At each end, one of the fishermen would detach the net from the line, which had now served its purpose, and, attached to a strong cable of adequate length, the net would then be drawn to the bottom of the water by a heavy stone, while the other end would be tied to a wooden peg which was fixed vertically in the middle of a piece of wood sufficiently long to straddle the opening on the surrounding ice.

Next morning we returned to haul in the catch. The central and end openings had to be chopped open and cleared of all ice with a wooden scoop, plaited across the middle with strips of skin to act as a strainer. This preliminary job done, the pegs which kept the net extended along the bottom during the night were drawn up on to the ice. In the center the net was kept attached, but at either end it was loosened from the cable and tied to the end of a rope which was first extended along the ice as it had been on the previous evening with the pole-needle. The net would pay out automatically under the ice as it was pulled up at the center for inspection. The fish would be disengaged one by one as we came to them, and tossed on the ice where they froze almost immediately. The inspection completed, the line would once more be pulled to spread the net back to its original position.

Apart from fishing, there was much to learn and one of the

most important things was the Montagnais language spoken by the Caribou Eaters. Every evening, from eight to nine, Father de Chambeuil gave me a lesson. I got up at four, and after prayers and meditation I set in order the notes I had made the night before, copying out the words and phrases I had added to my vocabulary. I had also to complete my theological studies.

Shortly before Christmas our Indians began to arrive in great numbers. At the Hudson's Bay Company store (the only trading post) they traded the furs they had trapped since the beginning of the snows. Tea and tobacco were the chief items in demand. Next came cartridges, powder, shot, axes, knives and needles. They provided themselves also with a few measures of flour — about a pound — and two or three pounds of sugar for the children. If any funds remained, they bought clothes, a little flannel, calico, cotton and similar items. Meanwhile the women, as well as the children, came to confession. The men followed them, up to the last moment . . .

I shall never forget that first midnight Mass. Our hall-chapel was small. Men on one side and women on the other, kneeling or squatting on their heels, were packed in like sardines. The altar was adorned with extra candles of caribou grease. Everyone joined heartily in the singing of the *Kyrie*, *Gloria* and *Credo*. Then came hymns in Montagnais. At the communion, the preparatory prayers were recited in chorus. Men first, followed later by the women and children, all approached the holy table singing in Montagnais: "Behold, the gentle Lamb. . . ." And all through the three Masses they continued to sing and pray aloud.

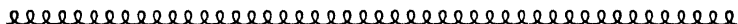
Most of them remained with us till the New Year, or "Kissing Day." It was then that the factor gave his big feast at which everyone received gifts. These included one or two cakes of tobacco, half a pound of tea, a pound or two of flour (per family) and a few lumps of sugar.

Meantime, they endeavored to obtain from the common charity a little fish for themselves and their dogs. Many of them had eaten nothing but caribou for the past five or six months and

they were glad to exchange for fish a few pieces of dried meat, a caribou tongue or a bladder of fat. Finally all set off happily for their respective camping grounds, undaunted by the prospect of the five or six days' journey on foot and nights spent under the open skies.

Brave Caribou Eaters, God bless them!

3: *A Case of Frostbite*



THE ANNUAL RETREAT at the Nativity mission, two hundred miles away, was to be given by Bishop Grouard, and Father de Chambeuil was kind enough to let me go. Paul Azé, though he had never made the trip before, was my guide, and the half-breed Germain Mercredi came along to take us over the portage which cuts the base of the long Bews Point. Just before daybreak, Paul, who had charge of the dogs, shouted to the leader, "*Marche, Trompette,*" and we were on our way.

I went ahead on snowshoes to break the trail in snow that was not yet hardened, even though the thermometer, when we started, read forty-seven degrees below zero. In such intense cold the snow was like sand. Our birchwood sled with its heavy load of rations, bedding, cooking utensils, axes, etc., moved very slowly, and it was a difficult haul for the dogs. As for the "new little Praying Man," my energy on foot had earned me something of a reputation among the Indians so that as I moved forward to set the pace, I felt quite proud of myself.

However, when I arrived in front of Cypress Point where the first fire was to be built, I was forced to wait because no one had told me exactly where to camp. Moreover, the axes were on the sled. At last my companions arrived and selected a spot in the woods. While the others felled a few dry trees to feed the fire and some green firs to shelter us with their branches, I cleared the chosen camp site with my snowshoes.

By this time my right foot was numb and stiff, and presently I felt a stinging pain, like the prick of a needle, in my big toe. I said nothing about this until after the camp was made ready and the fire lighted. Then I told Germain.

"It must be frostbite," he declared, and, indeed, on taking off my moccasins, I found my right foot as white as snow and as hard as ice. Being experienced in such matters, Germain picked up a handful of snow and rubbed the foot so thoroughly that the circulation was soon restored.

"You were lucky that we could treat it at once," he said, laughing, "but is it wise, under such circumstances, to continue your journey?"

I persuaded him that we should go as far as the portage where we could better decide what to do. And so, on the following morning, there I was again ahead of the dogs, with Germain.

In that region in January the days are very short and after we had covered only half the length of the portage it was necessary to camp for the night. Fortunately, wood was plentiful, and in spite of the cold our spirits rose with the flames of the huge campfire. My frostbitten toe was the main topic of conversation. Again Germain examined it very carefully, and though he showed no signs of alarm, he advised returning home because of the steady drop in the temperature during the night. Then we all turned in for the night, including the dogs who lay in the deep snow, and slept the sleep of the just.

On rising next day, I was happy to find my toe feeling normal again. I donned my snowshoes and followed Germain's trail as far as the end of the portage. There I thanked him for being my nurse, and he left us to return to Fond du Lac. Once more I started off across the snow ahead of the dogs. But at the end of the day my toe was as hard as a rock. Paul Azé massaged it in vain and I passed a very painful night. On resuming our march next day we were delighted to see a dense column of smoke rising above the trees on Caribou Point, which meant an encampment of Indians cooking their breakfast. We reached it very shortly and were heartily welcomed. The mistress of the house bathed my bad foot in warm water and wrapped it in hare skin, of which she gave me a good supply. We then moved on.

After three long days of traveling during which my pain increased, we reached Rock Point, our last camping place, only one day's march from the Nativity mission. But alas! a storm

blew up, immobilizing us completely for three whole days, at the end of which it was quite impossible for me to walk. I was wrapped in my blankets and lay flat on the bottom of the sled. The Nativity mission was some thirty miles away on the north side of the lake which we had to cross. Halfway there we had a rest at Grande Ile where fortunately we came upon a family of fisher folk who offered us the comfort of their warm hut and treated us to fresh whitefish.

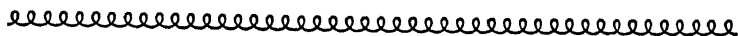
As we were about to continue our trip, we saw approaching the Indians who had been sent in search of us by Bishop Grouard. Immediately behind them came the good bishop himself. He helped me climb the rocks that led to the mission and on arriving my bandages were removed. The notorious toe was now quite black and shrunken; otherwise the foot was sound.

"Thank God, it is only the toe," exclaimed Bishop Grouard. "Dr. MacKay might have had to cut off the whole foot or even part of your leg."

However, when Dr. MacKay came to examine my injury, he declared that he did not feel up to performing the operation, as he had not practiced for a long time. Moreover, he had neither instruments nor anesthetic. At Bishop Grouard's request, Brother Ancel, the mission's skilled carpenter and handyman, fetched an old razor which he proceeded to sharpen and wash. With this he amputated the half-rotted first joint of the toe.

During my convalescence, Bishop Grouard gave me lessons in Montagnais and some invaluable advice about dealing with the Indians, administering the sacraments, teaching the children and so on. At the beginning of April, I was able to return to the Caribou Eaters. But as the wound was only partially healed, I had to avoid going far afield. Instead, I resumed my studies. On Corpus Christi, without feeling exceptionally nervous, I preached my first sermon in Montagnais.

4: *I Build a House*



DURING THE SUMMER we enjoyed a brief holiday with our community at the Nativity. Then on August 31 accompanied by Father Brémont I returned on the Hudson's Bay Company's barge to Fond du Lac where we disembarked after a lively voyage of ten days.

The sight of our poor old house—filthy and almost falling apart—shocked us into immediate action, and for three weeks we turned mud-masons to make what repairs we could. We must have seemed grotesque figures in our long robes as we mixed mud with hay and wielded primitive trowels to plaster the roof and walls. But of one thing we were convinced. We would have to build a new house, and soon.

Meanwhile the first mail of the winter arrived. A black-edged letter announced the deaths of my mother and sister only six days apart—it seemed strange that on the very same date the year before I had learned of my father's death. . . . My Caribou Eaters were full of sympathy. "The Almighty wants you to be ours entirely," they told me. "We will try to take the place of your parents, and we are going to pray for them."

Another letter in the same mail informed me that Bishop Grouard required the services of Father Brémont. I was to be left there all alone. For a moment I was almost disheartened, but as I had never before given way to the "blues," there seemed even less reason now that I had the best of companions, Christ Himself, present in the Holy Eucharist. Henceforth, I said to myself, I must devote all my energy and time to the performance of my duties as a missionary. With this resolution in mind, I drew up

a duty schedule which would occupy all my waking hours for months to come.

At the beginning of February, I went to the Nativity for my annual retreat, and while there confronted Bishop Grouard with my plan to build a new chapel-house.

"But where will you find wood on the rocks of Fond du Lac?" he objected.

"The Caribou Eaters and métis will help me find it," I answered. "Our present house makes them blush for shame."

Bishop Grouard was silent for a moment. Then he smiled. "I will gladly supply the necessary lumber, but how will you transport it all that distance?"

"On one of your Excellency's barges," I said as bravely as I could, and anticipating certain other objections, continued: "And after that we shall need only a little money for nails and window glass, and the services of Brothers Hémon and Leroux for a few months this year and next to complete the job. The good Brothers are willing to come and help if you will permit them."

"You have persuaded me, Father Breynat," said Bishop Grouard. "Now it is up to you and your people."

So, at the end of my retreat, the two Brothers and I, each of us with his own dogsled, were on our way to Fond du Lac. There, John Reid, the young factor who had succeeded old Joseph Mercredi, put his interpreter at my disposal. This was Louis Robillard who was not only well acquainted with the sparse forests in the surrounding territory, but was a devout Catholic and an excellent influence on the inhabitants. It was through him that many of the latter — together with their dogs — volunteered to work in relays a few days at a time.

As it was impossible to find all the wood in the same place, we opened two or three timberyards, where the big logs for the foundations — forty-two feet long — were squared down to ten inches on each face. Our twelve dogs were then harnessed to each log, and hauled them up hill and down for eight to twelve miles to bring them in.

After two months Brothers Hémon and Leroux returned to the

Nativity, but the following year they came back and the work was resumed. By Easter 1895, the house was standing. Thereupon we held a big thanksgiving feast to which all the workmen were invited. We had no hors d'oeuvre, soup, potatoes or vegetables, and for an excellent reason; but fresh tongues and slices of caribou meat abounded and there were besides sweetened rice and dried apple, *galettes* in fat with fish roe, raisin pudding with a thick sauce and tea and sugar. At the end of the meal, every man was given a pipe and a cake of tobacco.

In November, I began my visits to the camping grounds and for thirty-five days I traveled and lived the life of a true Caribou Eater. I had some grueling experiences, plowing on snowshoes through thick, soft snow, and there were other hardships which are better left untold. But the compensations were gratifying and outweighed the suffering.

The natives were delighted to have their "Praying Man" with them, living their life, and telling the story of "Him-who-made-the-world" and of his only Son, who died for them on the Cross. In my travels I heard a great number of confessions; those of good old women who had long been unable to come to the mission as well as those of hardened old ruffians who now surrendered to God.

On arriving at a camp I immediately organized a kind of general retreat. Then I inspected the big conical lodges made of caribou skins—in which our Indians usually lived—and chose the least dirty of them to serve as chapel. Logs, harness, personal belongings, heaps of dried meat and general filth were all removed and fresh branches of fir were spread on the bare earth to take the place of a rug. The whole place became God's, except for a corner where the "Praying Man's" bedding was laid out. The altar was then erected either on wooden posts or a few packing cases.

When it was not too late, the retreat began on the evening of my arrival with a service consisting of hymns, the rosary, a sermon and night prayers. Next morning there were prayers, Holy Mass

and another sermon and at midday, instruction and catechism for both children and grownups. All my free time was devoted to hearing confessions, visiting the sick, listening to troubles and resolving family feuds.

Christmas was celebrated in our new chapel. Months passed, with their joys and troubles. Then, on May 7, Brother Hoyer, Albert Robillard, the young half-breed, and I set out for the Nativity to collect the lumber promised us by Bishop Grouard. We really should have taken a canoe on our sled, in case the spring thaw should come early and prevent our return to the mission by dogsled. But spring seemed late. There were no signs of thaw at Fond du Lac; it might have been midwinter. Why burden ourselves with a canoe?

However, when we arrived at Bews Point the weather suddenly changed. During the night we were drenched with rain. We had no tent and nothing we could possibly use for shelter. It continued to rain, more or less heavily, every day. The temperature was gradually rising and we had to make haste. So, keeping to the middle of the lake, we proceeded to camp right on Bear's Tooth Island.

Next morning, before leaving the island, we collected some wood, which enabled us to cook our dinner on the lake itself. About ten o'clock that evening we reached the first of the Burnt Islands. Because of the swelling water beneath the ice, the lake had risen and it took us an hour to find a heap of snow sufficiently hardened by the wintry wind to permit passage of our sled to the land. The island was very uneven. There were pools everywhere, and no place to rest for the night. All we could do was to make a hanging bivouac and it was one o'clock in the morning before we turned in.

About noon the next day we were again on the lake. The ice had now closed up; there was no more snow, and our dogs stepped along smartly. So did I, going well ahead of them, my weather eye on the alert for open water. Brother Hoyer and Albert were on the sled. All went well until Shelter Point, where

the ice began to get somewhat slushy. Here I armed myself with a pole to see where the ice would yield under my weight and I went on, sounding my way and zigzagging to avoid the dangerous spots.

In this fashion we arrived without mishap at Low Point. But now there was no more ice. In front of us were the swirling waters of the Athabasca River, finally released from its winter prison. There was no possibility of making land. The melting ice along the shore had opened a sheet of water some fifty feet wide and the current was strong. What was to be done? To retrace our steps was more than we could bear after all the hardships we had suffered to get this far. On top of everything else a violent wind accompanied by hail now burst upon us.

The simplest thing was to try, with the aid of an axe, to break adrift the ice on which we now stood, so that we could use it as a raft to reach the shore. But all our efforts were in vain. The ice was too thick.

Then with a long pole I took soundings along the sheet of water with the idea of finding a shallower place where we could wade ashore. Suddenly the ice gave way and there I was in water above my waist. My companions quickly hauled me out and helped me to change my clothes in the shelter of a blanket, a very poor protection against the wind and hail.

Retracing their steps, Brother Hoyer and Albert had the good luck, after a few hundred yards, to discover a chunk of floating ice on which they speedily made the shore. How I wished I could have been with them! But wet as I still was, walking against that wind I should certainly have been frozen. So I had to be content to shiver in my damp blankets. Meanwhile on the shore, a big fire was quickly lighted and I felt comforted by the thought that I should soon be warm.

My companions made a small raft, and on this Albert came to fetch me. Somewhat carelessly, we put sled and baggage aboard, then I took a place for myself. Albert gave a hearty shove towards the shore, but in leaping aboard, he overturned the sled and it went to the bottom of the lake, carrying all our baggage and

cooking tackle. Meanwhile we were being carried away by the current, God knows where. Brother Hoyer, however, saw our danger. Without hesitating a moment, he plunged into the water and succeeded in getting us to shore. The dogs swam across.

While we dried our clothes, we debated the best means of reaching the mission. It was impossible to walk along the river because of the high, steep cliffs. How we regretted not having brought a small canoe! Finally we decided to follow a path which we found nearby. Five o'clock came and we had nothing in which to cook our meat or make tea. However, we satisfied our hunger with some dried meat and set off again in single file. In our ignorance we believed we could reach the Nativity mission before midnight.

About ten o'clock, we encountered a torrent which we tried in vain to cross. We decided it would be best to wait for daylight, when it would be easier to find the path on the other side. Meanwhile we would make a big fire and eat our piece of dried meat. There was plenty of wood, but when the time came to light the birchbark kindling, we found that all our matches were wet. What was to be done now? Wet through, as we were, from the fine rain that was now replacing the hail, it would have been dangerous not to move on.

Fortunately Brother Hoyer still had an axe. He set about felling small trees with which Albert and I tried to build a bridge. But the current carried away the first trees, and soon all three of us were very weary. From time to time we lay on the wet ground to take a little rest, then as soon as we felt chilled we again set to work. After several vain attempts we succeeded in felling a tree long enough to span the torrent. Then the work became easier. Finally, towards two in the morning, just as day was breaking, we crossed the torrent and about three hours later reached the mission. A little juniper fruit was all we had to appease our hunger on the way.

While we had been on the lake, the storm had carried away Bishop Grouard's little steamer, anchor and all, and had hurled it on the rocks of English Island. The Brothers had been laboring

all night to get it afloat again, but had not yet succeeded. Such is life in the North! Providentially none of us caught the slightest cold. Surely, God must take special care of missionaries, even when they do the most impractical things.

Alas! we now learned that the lumber intended for Fond du Lac had been dispatched to Fort Resolution, where Brother Ancel was then building a big church in honor of St. Joseph, and needed the lumber to replace a large consignment which had been lost in the Fort Smith rapids. To crown the bad luck, Brother Hoyer was taken away from me. He was to go as assistant carpenter to Brother Ancel, whose work had been seriously held up by the accident in the rapids. In exchange I was given a new companion in the person of Brother Eugene Courteille, a scholastic, whom I was to instruct in theology and Montagnais.

A boat was put at our disposal, and on this we hastily stowed away all the lumber we could find, good or bad, and off we went.

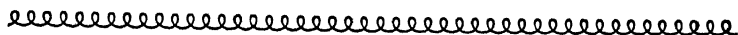
It was an excellent voyage, but we had to return the boat. To avoid hiring a man, I took Brother Eugene with me. He had strong arms and they proved useful with the oars. It might be noted that each of these trips back and forth meant traveling nearly four hundred miles.

The great event of the year 1897 was the prolonged visit of Bishop Grouard. A good number of Indians, some from a very great distance, came specially to the mission to be blessed by the "Big Praying Man" and to hear the impressive talks he gave in pure Montagnais. They liked confessing to him, so that they could receive the counsel they needed in their own language. Bishop Grouard could not stay until Easter. So on April 5 we held a special ceremony, in the course of which, despite our small congregation, there were eighteen confirmations. Next day our distinguished visitor left for the Nativity. It was thawing in earnest by the time he got back after an extremely uncomfortable journey.

On Easter Day, a vast number of my Indians arrived on the

scene, and there was general disappointment at having missed the "Big Praying Man." Happily it made no difference in the fervor with which they approached the sacraments. Those from the remotest districts, with the "Caribou temperament," were becoming more and more civilized. They showed themselves less shy with the priest and attended the services regularly. Several of them had learned to write in syllabic characters. And how proud they were of it! Soon they would be offering to give me lessons.

5: *A Funeral and Hard Times*



ONE NIGHT a good old man knocked at my door and told me that his daughter-in-law, who had come to us for Communion at Christmas, had fallen ill while returning to the camping ground.

"I reckoned," he told me haltingly, "how long it would take you to come. Then I set out. No one else could. My son, Severin, had to stay with his sick wife; his brother, Pierre, was spitting blood. My son-in-law, the only one strong enough to hunt, had to stay behind to get food for the family. I myself am too old now to shoot caribou and besides my sight is not good. But I can still walk even in deep snow. I couldn't use my sons' dogs on the journey because I had nothing to feed them. So I carried bedding and food on my back and had to camp three times. You can see I didn't move very fast. Now, with your dogs, we won't have to camp more than twice on the way back."

In the morning, after I had said Mass, we started off and it was not till noon of the fourth day that we arrived. The sick woman had died the evening before. I was touched when her husband, Severin, told me how, at a moment when she seemed conscious, he had said to her:

"Come, now, don't love this world any more; think of nothing but heaven, where you are going to see God."

The dying woman nodded slowly and a few moments later was dead.

The funeral which I conducted was a most dismal ceremony. The men cut down a large quantity of dry wood with which they made a big fire to thaw the earth where the grave was to be dug. It was a sandy spot, but there were big stones in the sand. The

only tool available was a piece of steel two inches wide by two feet long ordinarily used for demolishing beaver dams. For digging the grave all they had was a kind of big wooden scoop which usually served for clearing the snow when they were pitching a new camp. Poor people!

As for the coffin there was not a plank of wood to be had. So big firs were split and these they evened as best they could to form the coffin's sides. A sled served as its base. Then, to hold it all together they had to improvise nails out of the handles of small kettles. These they supplemented with wooden pegs. All this took two days.

Sunday evening came, and after respects had been paid to the dead woman, we accompanied the body to its last resting place. The coffin was placed on a sled and several men, taking the place of the dogs, hauled it as well as they could. The husband pushed from behind with a stick, for it was uphill part of the way.

When the grave had been blessed, the coffin was lowered into it and covered with frozen clods and stones. The poor husband, a model of faith and resignation, asked us to recite the rosary together as was the custom of his family on Sunday evenings. In spite of the intense cold, we knelt in the snow and begged divine mercy for the soul which had just left us.

Next day, before breaking camp, the husband said a final prayer at the grave, and placed beside the cross, well sheltered from the rain, a piece of tobacco carefully wrapped in birchbark. This was done so that if, some day, an Indian passing by should need tobacco, he might take the little packet, and in return for it—according to custom—say a prayer for the repose of the departed soul. Then, at some future time when he had tobacco to spare, either he, or someone he had sent, would replace the little packet. The next smoker to come along would be happy to find it and, in gratitude, say another prayer. (This custom has now died out.)

There being no food available, it was impractical to think of returning home without a preliminary hunt. I harnessed my dogs who had eaten nothing for more than a day and started off,

following the tracks of a hunter named Pierre. Two days before this man had wounded a big caribou and had now gone in search of it. Under ordinary circumstances, the trail he had left would have been easy to follow, but in that soft deep snow, the dogs were almost buried. With my own waning strength I tried to help them, but lack of food had left them exhausted.

I began to wonder if we should ever find Pierre, and whether it might not be wiser to retrace our steps before the sun went down. Then, suddenly, somewhere to the right, I heard the sound of an axe, and at the same time my dogs became wild with excitement. They had scented caribou! With new strength they forged ahead and soon found our hunter. On the ground at his feet lay the caribou, half frozen and already dismembered.

Quickly, we piled a few branches of spruce on the snow and, with wood in abundance all about us, we soon had a roaring fire. While one of the animal's quarters was roasting on the end of a stick, we treated ourselves to the luxury of an appetizer—the frozen marrow from the animal's foot bones. For dinner service we had nothing but a bowl; there were no plates or forks. But we had all we needed in the roasted meat and our dogs gorged themselves on frozen chunks of raw flesh and entrails.

Our return to the camp was made with what the natives called "a strong heart." On our sled we had the big caribou which would provide supper for ourselves and the Montagnais women who, since morning, had broken camp and pitched a new one without a morsel of food. When we reached the camp we saw in the distance other hunters who had departed in search of supplies for us. They had killed only three caribou.

Next morning I decided to leave. We had two caribou to last out the journey. As we were loading them, some children ran up, all out of breath, to announce the arrival of strangers—quite an event in these vast solitudes.

It seemed that one of our hunters had not returned the night before. Usually no one worried about this, for it was the kind of thing that often happened. He had met an Indian from another camp and had gone home with him. There, he told the people

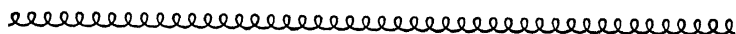
who were Montagnais that the "Praying Man" was nearby and short of food. Whereupon these good people decided to fetch me to baptize their newborn babies, and at the same time bring me a little meat.

Four of them now entered the lodge where I was, and set down four small bags of food. One kind old woman had sent me a piece of fine pemican, with the following words inscribed on the bark wrapping: "Don't forget, I want very much to go to confession. Bring me a little tea and tobacco." Such devotion should not go unrewarded. So I set off that day with the Indians who had come to fetch me, and by evening we arrived at their camp. There I had the pleasure of meeting once more quite a number of my Caribou Eaters, among them some good old women who could seldom come to the mission.

Now, at the end of my journey, I realized how worth-while it had been. I had conducted one funeral, performed four baptisms, and heard thirty confessions. Moreover, the ten Indians who had returned with me to the mission had all received the sacraments. As to the material side of the trip, that too had been worth-while, for I had brought back almost a thousand pounds of meat and fat.

My joy was considerably lessened, however, by the sad news which had arrived in my absence. Father Soullier, Superior General of the Oblates, was dead.

6: *Famine and Pestilence*



IN 1899, on the day after Epiphany, I was returning from the Nativity with Germain Mercredi and his brother Vincent. While we were making our usual halt at Grande Ile, I developed a high fever and a violent sore throat which compelled me to take to bed. But I insisted that my companions go on. Sister Mace, the infirmarian, diagnosed my condition as diphtheria and the illness ran its course, my temperature mounting steadily. Some days I shook with fever unable to get warm even though I lay as close as possible to the hot stove. Suddenly one morning on waking I realized I no longer felt cold. A day or two later I was up and about, completely well again. I have always felt that without such a good nurse as Sister Mace and the prayers of the pastor, Father Le Doussal, Grand Ile would have been my last resting place on earth.

That same winter we had a famine. Unfortunate wretches flocked to us from all sides. I particularly remember a certain old widow, "Hay Cinder," and her numerous family. Pierre, her youngest child, on going to the stove where one of our Brothers had been thawing fish for the dogs, caught sight of a few bits of stick-fish which had stuck to the hob, and flinging himself upon this, began scraping off the dried blood. It was a heart-rending sight.

After giving him a good meal, we decided that Pierre should stay with us till the thaw. Meanwhile, his mother, brothers and sisters, their hunger temporarily appeased, were provided with a few hooks and snares to try their luck on the shores of the lake.

On top of the famine, an epidemic of a malignant type of

influenza broke out. However, it proved fatal only to those who despite their fever continued to work in the cold and even in the water. Such action may seem very rash, but the only food available was that provided by the lake which, toward the end of March, was covered with ice four or five feet thick. It was beneath this that the Indians, and we too, had to seek our daily supply of fish. It was impossible to do this without getting wet. How could one avoid catching cold when the wind blew at a temperature of twenty or thirty below zero? And how, in such weather, could wood be cut for the fire?

Soon the whole camp was down with fever. To add to our woes there was no medicine. Many died before I could reach them, others were in their death agony when I arrived. And it was almost impossible to bury the dead in a country where timber was scarce and the ground was frozen to a depth of five or six feet.

To help feed the survivors, children drew a little water from beneath the ice to make tea. Fathers, mothers, big brothers and sisters, all who could still somehow manage to stand and stagger a few steps, set snares in the forest or went to see if there was anything on the hooks under the ice. A missionary did what he could: shared his provisions, distributed the few tablets of quinine he had, and offered spiritual consolation.

Perhaps the most pathetic of that winter's epidemic victims was an old fellow called "Man's Shadow." In spite of his influenza and high fever, he had crossed the lake on Easter Day to receive Holy Communion. Next morning, with the fever and influenza still upon him, he had gone off to inspect the nets near his home, two hours' journey from the mission. On reaching there he had learned that his son Henry, who lived still farther away, had killed a bear and two or three moose.

Ignoring the protests of his wife, lying ill on the floor, he immediately set out for his son's camp. A little girl accompanied him but as she delayed his progress, he soon sent her back. Then he pressed on alone, strengthened by the thought of the moose meat and bear fat which awaited him. A few days later, in a dis-

mantled encampment, they found his body. It was half burned and partially devoured by his dogs which were lying, still harnessed, beside what remained of their master.

Bishop Grouard had asked me to bring him Brother Courteille at the first thaw. When we left on June 4 the lake was still frozen over, but as the Nativity mission was 175 miles to the south of us, we were sure that by the time we neared it the southern end of the lake would be free of ice and we could then use our skiff to shorten the journey. Our provisions were low. We took with us barely enough to last ten days.

We made good time and encountered no great difficulties as far as Black Bay, although on several occasions we had to portage our skiff and heavy equipment. However, a week had passed, food was running low, and an equal distance had to be covered. At St. Mary Island, we knelt and said a rosary before the little statue of Our Lady that Father de Chambeuil had erected in thanksgiving after a near shipwreck. Danger lent added fervor to our prayers.

At first we feared we should have to make the whole round of Black Bay, but luckily it proved free of ice and we camped on a small island. The surrounding water was deep, so we set a couple of baited hooks and in the morning, to our great joy, found we had caught two fine trout. One of them was the biggest trout I had ever seen. When I held it by the gills its tail touched the ground. It had very tasty yellow meat, and for a time, at any rate, the nightmare of starvation, which had momentarily haunted us, faded away.

The contours of the big bay made it very hard going. Sometimes we had to portage. Sometimes we threaded our way perilously through masses of floating ice and twice we barely missed being crushed between enormous chunks of it. Once we saved our lives only by leaping on to the ice, rapidly hauling up our skiff, and sliding it along till we came to the first free water.

On June 19, a wild storm burst upon us, breaking up the whole stretch of ice that had so far remained stationary and

tossing it about in huge blocks which crashed together all over the great bay. We had just enough time to get ashore on small Birch Island, a little way off Poitras Point. For eight days we stayed there powerless to go on, while the ice blown by the lake wind rushed past us. Now it was coming from the direction of Fond du Lac and this meant that we had to wait till all the ice from the northeast had gone by. An unnerving spectacle, if ever there was one!

The last of our trout caught in Black Bay soon disappeared and the only food we had left was a few very small dried fish. We ate the bigger ones first. There was nothing to be found on the island, and it was useless to bait any hooks in the drifting ice. The daily ration was reduced to one fish, not even half a meal! Trying out the old adage: "He who sleeps, dines," we turned in early and got up about midday. Our famished stomachs, however, refused to be convinced.

But one day I saw the dawn of a smile on my companion's face. A heavenly inspiration had just suggested a means of adding to our pitiful menu. . . . There were no scavenging animals about, not even a mouse, so the skins of the dried fish we had contemptuously thrown away still lay scattered about on the ground. Brother Courteille gathered them up, washed them carefully in the lake and threw them into the saucepan. They didn't take long to cook and in a few minutes, after dividing them into two portions, there we were, feasting gaily. Hunger is truly the best appetizer, and the best of condiments as well.

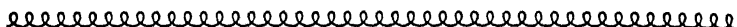
At last, on the eighth day, we were able to force a way through the last of the floating ice and were soon in free water. We still had three fish left, the smallest of the lot. So we went ashore, cooked them, made a little tea, then again took to the oars.

About five or six o'clock, having rounded Poitras Point, we camped on Grilled Dog Island where, at that time of the year, there were plenty of big trout. Before disembarking we cast our net, and were unloading our baggage when I saw one of the floats in violent agitation. I jumped into the skiff and in a few moments brought back a fine whitefish.

While we were pitching our tent, the same thing happened with another float and this time we caught a fine salmon trout weighing about three pounds. It was soon roasted in front of the fire and made a feast for our supper. Meanwhile I baited each of our three hooks with the whitefish. Knowing exactly the right spot, we lost no time in setting them, after which we returned to finish pitching our camp, and between the warm fire and a good meal were soon revived.

Two days later, about two in the morning, we finally arrived at the Nativity mission.

7: *Caribou in Plenty*



EARLY IN SEPTEMBER, 1899, Brother Courteille and I again set out from Fond du Lac. The object of my journey was to get as far as Sand Portage Lake, five days' distance from the mission. Brother Courteille was not going so far, but I had good dogs and strong legs, and was sure to find an Indian to go with me the rest of the way.

At my first stop there was great excitement when the arrival of the "Little Praying Man" was noised abroad. The children unharnessed my dogs and learned to know them all by name: Finette, Dauphin, France, Niger. I established myself in the biggest lodge where a piece of new calico was laid over fir branches for my bed; for food there was a huge quarter of meat.

There is no need to detail the various exercises to which I devoted most of my time in each camp I visited that fall and winter: congregational prayers, hymn-singing, instruction of the grown-ups and catechism for the children, the settling of little family or neighbors' quarrels, and finally, on the last day, a general Communion. These were repeated at each encampment I visited before rejoining my mission in December.

That autumn and winter the fishing was good and our nets were still under the ice when we heard from the Indians that great herd of caribou were on their way south. Immediately all the hunters rushed forth to the chase and returned with a supply of meat. Men and dogs had all the caribou they wanted. In the encampment one evening we had a fancy to roast the head of a small caribou just as it was, hair and all. Our Indians — experts at this — suspended it on a strip of hide to rotate it as if on a spit.

When it was cooked to a turn everyone took his share and laid it under his blanket like a pillow. During the night it cooled and, next morning, provided us with a hearty and delicious breakfast.

The part taken by the caribou in the life of the Indians at Fond du Lac was of prime importance. It constituted above all else the wealth of the Caribou Eater, for besides being a wholesome and appetizing food, it provided him with materials for housing, clothes and even tools.

Its bones were rich in fat which the squaw would extract by breaking the bones with the back of a hatchet or between stones and then boiling them in a heavy pot. At the right moment, a little branch of fir or spruce was used to skim the fat from the surface. Then the branch was wrung out by hand so that the fat dripped down into a vessel prepared to receive it. When all the fat had been collected, the mistress of the lodge licked her fingers with obvious enjoyment and rubbed them in her hair. Occasionally she might wipe them with moss.

The same procedure was adopted for the second skimming, then for the third and again and again until the last drop of fat had been extracted from the bones. This fat, sweeter and finer than the ordinary coarse tallow, was used to make the best pemican, a combination of powdered meat mixed with a third or half its volume of the fat which could be kept for a year or perhaps two. It was also eaten just as it was, with powdered or dried meat if the latter was lacking in fat.

Grease made from the marrow of the feet was considered even finer, and was eaten uncooked, especially in winter. Even the raw meat was pleasant to taste and easily digested. This I discovered from experience when, because of nervous fatigue, I was unable to digest any other food.

The preparing of dried meat was not a complicated operation. For this, the meat from the ribs—the “flat ribs,” as the Indians and métis call them—or from the breastbone was used. All bones were removed and the meat was then laid out to dry under

the stove in winter, or hung on poles in the sun when the days grew long. The other parts of the caribou were also boned, cut into thin slices, and dried in a similar manner. The slices were then pulverized on a rock with the back of a hatchet.

To obtain material for clothing, the skin of the caribou was first stripped of its hair, by a scraper made of bone. Then, to make it supple, it was treated with the brains of the animal which were always carefully preserved for this purpose. Next it was exposed to the wind to whiten it and remove any stiffness that remained. Finally, to make it more resistant to humidity and give it color, it was subjected for some time to the action of smoke from a fire made of half-rotting wood. The type of wood varied according to the color desired. The skin was now ready to be used in the making of summer jackets, moccasins, gloves, mittens, leggings, and many other articles.

For winter clothes, the skin would be tanned in the same way, but with the hair left on. Paradoxically the skin of a caribou killed in summer or early autumn provided warmer garments because of the fine, resistant hair whereas that of an animal killed in winter was usually well punctured by subcutaneous worms, so that it was hardly usable.

Stillborn animals provided an even finer pelt, brown, frizzy and durable. Yearlings, too, male or female, produced a very fine skin. From these were made the big hooded capes still worn by men and youths in the Northwest, where they are considered the best garments for traveling. They are light when one is going on snowshoes, and so warm that it is possible for their wearers to endure a temperature of forty degrees below zero and stand up to a blizzard. The same skins were used by the women and girls to make long beltless dresses which fell straight to their ankles.

As for the children, their mothers used all their art to dress them as smartly as possible. Often the skin of the head, still bearing the small new horns, was kept attached to the skin itself and served as a hood: this made the babies look extremely attractive. To protect the children's hands against the cold, mittens were

fixed to their sleeves, with an opening at the level of the wrist. With loose mittens, kept in place only by a cord, a child might take out his hands and get them frostbitten, but with these fixed mittens there could be no danger of this as he needed his mother to help him get them off.

Reindeer skin, rather than the caribou's, was used for the Indian's portable house, or lodge. This was a kind of conical tent varying in size, open at the top to allow the smoke to escape. The skins, stitched together, were mounted and stretched upon poles, spaced out in a circle at the base and strongly lashed together at the top. The whole family had to find room for themselves here, the father in the place of honor. There were no chairs, only a few packages of meat or piles of rags. Everyone squatted on his heels around the stove, which stood in the center, and at night lay down, each in his own place, fully dressed and wrapped in a blanket or gown made of caribou skin, complete with its hair. When visitors arrived, they just squeezed up a bit, and the night would be that much warmer!

Caribou skin also served to make collars and harness for the dogs, as well as cordage and covering for the sleds. The cordage sometimes consisted of plain strips of leather, wide enough for the required strength. At other times it was made of several pieces plaited together. When preparing snares for bears or other large animals, strips, slightly moistened, were twisted to the thickness of nearly an inch so that even a large animal would have difficulty in breaking them. By way of contrast a sort of thin string or *babiche* of different thicknesses, for the stringing of snowshoes, was also made from the skin of the caribou.

The skin of the feet, which was tougher, was used to make sacks for meat and all the family's belongings. The dorsal sinews provided thread for the making of clothes and shoes. From the bones, spoons, bowls and hooks were made; from the horns, handles for tools and those ingenious "hook-knives" used for cutting and planing wood, snowshoe frames, the framework of canoes and sleds, and axe handles.

Nowadays the Indians no longer depend solely, as they once

did, on the caribou. The little barges of eight to ten tons have given place to oil-driven tugs with motors of anything from twenty-five to one hundred horsepower, by which provisions of all kinds are imported annually. Yet the caribou does remain, as it always will, the Indians' basic form of wealth as a source of food and clothing.

There is no more remarkable sight than the yearly migration of the caribou, in countless hordes, from north to south and later back to the north. This migratory movement starts on the plains during August, when the young, born in the spring, are strong enough to follow their mothers. When crossing a river or the narrows of a lake, they swim in such tightly packed bands that they are extremely dangerous to meet in a canoe, or for that matter in any other craft. They are no less so as they advance in serried ranks through the woods or over icebound lakes, and any animal that took it into its head to stop would immediately be crushed to death by those at its heels. In March, the caribou return toward the plains where the dams give birth to their offspring in peace and rear them till the next southward migration in August.

These summer and winter migrations take six, eight or even ten hours to pass a given point. At Fort Rae they could remember one that took a fortnight. My successor at Fond du Lac, Father Charles Gamache, happened to witness one of these fabulous movements in the autumn of 1943, when hordes of caribou passed within a few yards of the mission garden. For ten days their flood, fifty miles wide, continued without pause. From the density of this tremendous herd, the speed at which it moved and the time it took to pass, he estimated that it numbered at least two million caribou. In this his calculation agreed with that of several other white men who were with him and who also witnessed the migration.

During this northern tour in the fall of 1899 I had seen so much of the caribou that the spirit of Nimrod began to take possession of me even though I had never hunted before. As a matter of fact

my right eye was too weak to see the foresight of a gun, but the left one was normal enough to make hunting possible.

So off I went with an old carbine on my shoulder and four or five cartridges in my pocket. I had scarcely gone a mile when at the turn of the track, fifty paces in front of me, I caught sight of a fine caribou, its big horns erect. He looked at me full of surprise. It was my soutane, I suppose, that attracted his attention. Probably he had never seen one before. I raised the carbine to my left shoulder and fired. In spite of my poor eyesight, the bullet found its mark and the poor beast fell groaning. He was still stirring slightly, but rather than use another cartridge I hit him sharply on the head with the butt of my rifle. That was the end of the caribou, but not the end of my problem. What was I to do with my victim now that I had killed it? I had no knife with which to dismember it and no axe to make any sort of encampment. Left where it was, the beast was bound to be devoured by dogs. Then an idea came to me: I undid the girdle of my soutane and tying it firmly about the neck of my caribou, I started off, dragging my victim behind me. A short distance away I came upon a heap of wood collected for the winter, and after something of a struggle I succeeded in hoisting my dead companion to the top of it. Then I hastened back to the mission. In a few moments my dogs were harnessed and half an hour later my quarry was in our hangar.

At the first news of my exploit, a young child ran up and I told him the story. But when I mentioned that I had hit the beast with the butt of my rifle, he was away like a flash, and in no time at all, this news had spread by "moccasin telegraph" first throughout the fort, then from camp to camp.

It was a major scandal among the whole population for they believed that the spirit of the caribou thus struck would tell all the rest of its race. These would never return and very shortly there would be a disastrous famine. Consternation spread throughout the encampments. To every individual in the mission, to all the caravans coming in from every direction, I had to give renewed assurances that their belief was mere superstition. The

good God, I told them, had created the caribou to serve as their food, and it was of little or no importance how they killed them.

The more sensible were willing to take my word for it.

"We know very well you have never deceived us," they said, "but . . ."

There was always a "but." My Indian friend Deaf Laurence was one of those who with the best will in the world could not help being suspicious. He requested that I write to the "Big Praying Man" and ask his advice. It would reassure the Indians. I promised that I would.

Just then the chief, Moberley, appeared on the scene, bighearted but wrongheaded. After paying his respects to the Blessed Sacrament he shook hands with me as usual, and made me a present of some "flat ribs" of dry caribou. After this he told me the news of his family, his camp and his hunting, followed quite abruptly by reproaches for my behavior in the affair of the caribou. He accused me of exposing the Indians to the dangers of starvation and gradually working himself up to a pitch of excitement, he ended by saying:

"The Big Praying Man ought to send you away from here."

I told him what I had just promised Deaf Laurence and added, "I will inform 'The Big Praying Man' of your wish to see the back of me." He was nonplused at this and I went off to hear confessions.

It was Christmas Eve and from all the encampments the Caribou Eaters had assembled in greater numbers than usual. Men, women and children, all radiant with health, were a magnificent sight in their brand-new clothes of caribou skin.

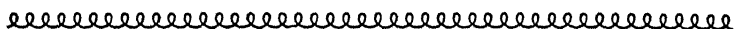
At midnight Mass, while hundreds of dogs, brought by their masters as far as the doors, were baying at the moon, my Caribou Eaters chanted the liturgy in Latin, interrupted by hymns set to the old French airs, such as *Il est né le Divin Enfant* or *Le voici l'Agneau si doux*, but sung in their own language. The sermon adapted to the needs of the congregation was naturally about the mystery of Christmas. All, without exception, received Holy Communion. Everyone returned faithfully to Mass the

next morning, and all prayed and sang with equal fervor. The theme of my sermon was that the caribou had been specially created by "Him-who-made-the-world" to serve as food for the Tinneh Indians. They might kill it by what means they chose, any tradition to the contrary being purely superstition.

"Several of you," I added, "have asked me to write to the Big Praying Man to inquire if all I have been telling you is really true. I am going to do so, and I want as many as possible of you to come at Easter; then I will read you his reply."

The day after Christmas I harnessed my dogs and left for Black Lake, with a group of Indians who acknowledged the distinguished hunter Libal as their uncontested chief. We camped twice. My object was to bring the sacraments to some worthy women, one of them old and blind, who had not been able to get away. But an epidemic of influenza had broken out in the camp and I myself felt the symptoms of another dose of diphtheria. I returned in haste to the mission where, aided by Brother Courteille I took to my plank bed, and entrusted myself to God.

8: *Still Living in Plenty*



AS THE YEAR 1900 began, fever still prevented my saying Mass, so Brother Courteille took my place in the chapel where a large crowd of Indians had assembled. Toward the end of the month, when I had half recovered, I had a visit from Severin, Deaf Laurence's son, who told me that his sister Cecily who was about to have a child was very ill two days' journey away, and had asked for me. I set out at once, but by the time I reached the camp Cecily had already died. All I could do was to pray for her and bestow a last blessing. Beside her I found her newborn baby, apparently full of life. I baptized him, and early in the morning set off, all alone, for the mission. To everyone's astonishment, I arrived the same evening.

My strength had evidently returned. I was able to make my annual retreat with the Nativity community, after which I came back to my mission to instruct some children for their First Communion.

As Easter approached, back came the Indians, eager to hear the reply of the Big Praying Man, Bishop Grouard, about the caribou affair.

On Easter Day I addressed my flock:

"The Big Praying Man wishes me to inform you that he has not the time, still less the inclination, to write a pastoral letter in order to explain to you that God created the caribou to provide the food you need, and that you may kill them any way you wish, with snare, spear, gun, or even with a club."

Then I quoted from the letter I had in my hand:

"Tell your Caribou Eaters that if they have not enough intelli-

gence to understand what you have told them, and what I now repeat myself, then I can do nothing about it. Let them ask the Author of all good to give them such understanding . . . I bless them, just the same, with all my heart.'"

A solemn silence prevailed throughout my address which I ended by calling attention to the fact that in spite of my blow with the rifle butt, the caribou had continued extremely abundant all through the winter. My victim's spirit evidently bore me no grudge, since it had completely failed to give warning to the other caribou. It, too, must be quite dead.

On emerging from the chapel, Paul Azé, the orphan who had been brought up by Father de Chambeuil and the companion of my first journey to the Nativity, told me in the hearing of all present:

"If there are still plenty of caribou, it is only because the Almighty does not wish us to suffer starvation for the misdeed of his Praying Man. He has had pity on us. But as for you," he continued, "you will never be able to kill another caribou!"

To which there was general assent.

In the mission field, even more than elsewhere, the priest must be all things to all men. One job is to act as judge in family quarrels.

One day I was approached by a very dejected Indian.

"My wife," he complained, "won't listen to anything I tell her. Don't you think it would be a good thing if we were allowed to live apart for a few months?"

I told him to bring his wife to see me, which he did. Then I invited the husband to repeat his complaint in her presence.

"My wife is a woman," he declared, "and as a woman she has no sense at all . . ."

He spoke for a quarter of an hour, airing one complaint after another. When he had finished, he called on his wife to speak her mind.

"Only don't tell lies," he warned her, still keeping perfectly calm.

The wife was quite unmoved while her husband was pleading his case. She never interrupted or showed signs of impatience. Her expression throughout was as impassive as marble.

It was now her turn.

"It is true," she began, "that I am only a woman, and being a woman I have no sense. But my husband, though a man, often speaks and acts just like a woman, and has no more sense than a woman has . . ."

Thereupon she proceeded, still quite calmly and without ever raising her voice, to tell of all her husband's unreasonable demands, and with a subtlety that showed she was greatly his superior.

The husband was equally unmoved during the exposure she made him undergo in my presence. And now it was for me to give judgment.

"I have listened to you both," I said, "with the closest attention. There have clearly been faults on both sides. So according to Our Lord's commandment you must forgive and forget. In the future the one who can keep silent, when the other does or says something stupid or shows bad temper, will give proof, by saying nothing, of more sense than the other. Now kneel down, both of you; take one another's hand as a sign that you each forgive, and I will give you my blessing."

Next year, his face beaming, the husband returned.

"My wife," he told me, "is now the best of women. That was a good lesson you gave her; it did her a lot of good."

"And what about you?" I asked. "Have you been treating her any better?"

"I have certainly done my best," he replied.

"Well, then," I said, "if you both go on helping one another as our Saviour commanded, you will be happy always."

As the Caribou Eaters' Praying Man I was expected to know everything, including medicine, which I had never studied. There were even times when I was expected to perform miracles.

Once, at two in the morning, I was summoned by an old Indian named, with reason, Devil, whose child was dying. As I said the

rosary I looked closely at the tiny invalid. His abdomen was swollen and seemed hard as a rock. I thought of an instrument used by French mothers in similar circumstances and recalled that I had one in my loft. This was duly fetched, and after the necessary explanations given in Montagnais, I put some warm water in the receptacle, added a little bear's grease and performed the obvious operation.

Early next morning my "Devil" returned, his face beaming.

"A real marvell!" he cried. "My child is saved!"

At my suggestion he went into the chapel to thank aloud the Author of all good. That same afternoon I was confronted by a woman all in tears:

"My husband says you don't like him," she moaned.

"Why is that?" I asked.

"He says you cured old Devil's child, but you won't do anything for him. He wants to have some of that wonderful medicine. . . ."

In vain I attempted to explain to the poor woman that the cases were not the same. Her husband was tubercular and I could do nothing for him. But my pleading was useless and I had to humor her. So I fetched the instrument, explained the mechanism and recommended a very small dose, without grease. The woman went off hopefully, but presently returned.

"I can't get it to work," she sighed. "My husband wants you to come yourself. The medicine will have more effect."

I found the invalid kneeling on a caribou skin in the middle of a small log cabin. "Hurry, hurry," he called, as soon as he saw me. I did what was required of me, keeping a serious mien, while a goodly number of Caribou Eaters, men, women and children, who had rushed in to witness the "miracle," knelt all around the room piously telling their beads.

That autumn we were surprised to receive a delightful companion, Father Biehler. He brought with him a letter and a parcel from Bishop Grouard which gave me a slight feeling of uneasiness.

"I am very sorry to learn," the Bishop wrote, "that your health

leaves much to be desired. So I am sending you a few little things to 'patch it up' . . . you must take care of yourself, because we need you badly . . . in March, I shall come to see you and stay a fortnight."

The box contained two or three pounds of *chocolat Menier*, two flasks of Chartreuse, a little brandy and a box of "Lu" biscuits from Nantes. These luxuries were, perhaps, all that Bishop Grouard had received that year from his friends in France. I wondered if he had ever treated any other of his missionaries like that, for I had overheard some whisperings. Perhaps it was a case of fattening up a victim for sacrifice. Perhaps the arrival of young Father Biehler whom I must instruct in the language and train for the ministry meant that he was shortly to replace me. There was no sure way of knowing. So I decided not to speculate but to leave all to Providence.

As the feast of All Saints approached, the caribou made their customary appearance. Before that there had been no sign of their coming, and there had been murmurs going about that after the ignominious way I had treated one of their number they would never come back. However, by November 10 they were approaching from all directions, and in numbers even greater than the year before.

I had a fancy to try my luck again and I set off, carbine on shoulder, hatchet in belt and knife in pocket. As I watched the Indians firing without success, several caribou suddenly charged in my direction. I fired into the group and one of them fell dead. As I reached my victim simultaneously with the Indians, I noticed among them Paul Azé, who had warned me that I should never kill another caribou. From the way he looked I knew he could scarcely believe that it was I who had killed it.

"It certainly wasn't you, Paul," I told him. "Now, perhaps, you'll agree that in spite of your predictions the caribou bear me no ill will. You should be ashamed of your superstitious beliefs. And the next time the Big Praying Man tells you something, mind you believe him."

Old Devil, whom I mentioned previously, had the following explanation to offer:

"There must have been a bit of iron on the butt of your carbine. I am sure it was this that touched the wounded beast when you killed it last year, not the wood. That's why . . . the caribou have come back."

The following anecdote may give a better idea of the character I was dealing with. One day I had been preaching to a large congregation which seemed to be more impressed than usual. My hearers were smoking their pipes and chatting among themselves in the room adjoining the chapel when I came in after making my thanksgiving. Some of them were beginning to congratulate me, when old Devil spoke up with some impatience:

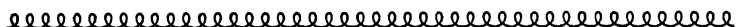
"Yes," he growled, "you spoke well. But it is not surprising you tell us fine things. You take them all out of the big books you have in your room. Not like me. I have no wish to learn to read. When I talk — and I can do so for a long time — all I say, as everyone knows, comes out of my own head."

Father Biehler was a great help to me at Christmas. He took charge of all material preparations which were made easier by the generosity of my brother Joseph and some friends in France. They had just sent me six large candlesticks, a fine cross, two five-branched candelabra, some artificial flowers, and a magnificent monstrance.

With proper wax candles we had obtained from abroad instead of those made of caribou grease which were all we had used in other years, we were thus able to have sixteen lights on the altar. Never before had it shone so brightly.

Father Biehler led the liturgical singing, and was joined with the greatest fervor by men, women and children. There were more than a hundred communicants, and the whole congregation seemed transported with joy.

9: *The Consequence of an Indiscretion*



IN MARCH, 1901, Bishop Grouard came to see me. My health was still very indifferent and I felt the need of a change of air. I therefore asked if I could accompany him that summer on his mission boat, the *Saint-Alphonse*. He replied that the changing situation had made it an urgent matter to divide the vicariate, and to create a new bishop. He had therefore sent to Archbishop Langevin a list of three names, including mine, to submit to the Supreme Pontiff, but Archbishop Langevin had rearranged the list and placed my name at the top.

All this came from the indiscretion of Father Lacombe to whom Bishop Grouard had once remarked, "It's that little Caribou Eater, Father Breynat, who will be the staff of my old age and my successor." Father Lacombe had repeated these words to Archbishop Langevin, and the latter had then recommended me.

In July, I was commissioned by Bishop Grouard to visit half his vicariate in his stead. I was to have the powers of a visitor and no one was to be aware of my official capacity. The big question to settle concerned the new boarding school which was to be established as a branch of the one at Providence. The site had not yet been chosen, but Father Lecorre, superior of the Providence mission, was to go to the estuary of Ox River to see if that spot was suitable.

When I arrived at Providence, to the salute of bells, the missionaries and Indians were greatly disappointed that it was I, little Father Breynat, not Bishop Grouard, who had come to visit them. And my scrawny appearance did nothing to dispose them in my favor. The remainder of the trip went off without incident,

after which I went for a rest to the community of the Nativity, where Father Le Doussal was now superior and Father de Chambeuil his assistant. To occupy my leisure I preached the first Communion retreat for the schoolchildren and asked their prayers that I might obtain a "great grace." Later, when my episcopal nomination became known, one of them cried:

"Now I know why Father Breynat asked for our prayers. He wanted to be made a bishop!"

On August 30 Bishop Grouard wrote to say he had had no reply from Rome, so I decided to return to Fond du Lac. As I took leave, according to custom, of the factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, he congratulated me on my nomination as bishop of Mackenzie. He had seen it in the newspapers, of which he offered me a whole pile.

There was no doubt about it. The papers announced the division of the vicariate, with all details in conformity to the project as it had been submitted to Rome. Bishop Grouard kept the southern portion, to be known as the Athabasca vicariate, comprising the Athabasca and Peace River districts. The Mackenzie and Yukon districts formed a new vicariate called the Mackenzie vicariate which was entrusted to me, the Reverend Gabriel Breynat, Oblate of Mary Immaculate, now to be titular Bishop of Adrumetum.

I departed next day for my mission, where I notified my brave Indians that I was probably going to leave them after Christmas. On December 8, two dogsleds arrived with the official mail. The couriers were very proud to be the heralds of such important news and loudly proclaimed my promotion to the curious crowd. For me there was the following letter from Monseigneur Langevin, archbishop of St. Boniface:

"It is my honor and pleasure to inform you that the Holy See has named you Vicar Apostolic of Mackenzie, and Bishop of Adrumetum. Monseigneur the Apostolic Delegate has sent me the briefs which he has just received from Rome. *Ad multos et felicissimos annos.*

"It is with all my heart that I salute, congratulate and embrace your Excellency fraternally *in osculo sancto*.

"Be of good heart! The will of the Pope is the will of God. It is a very heavy burden that now weighs upon your shoulders; but with God's grace nothing is impossible.

"Our Immaculate Mother and the Archangel Gabriel will aid you, and your colleagues will be happy to do all they can to support you.

"Please accept from me a pastoral staff.

"The boundary of the two Vicariates of Athabasca and Mackenzie is the 60th parallel.

"Good-by for the present and please be assured, my dear Bishop and Priest, of my most fraternal affection in Jesus and Mary Immaculate. Signed: ADÉLARD LANGEVIN, O.M.I., *Archbishop of St. Boniface*."

At Christmas a crowd gathered. Not one of my Indians was missing, and when the doors of the chapel opened, each took his place in the semidarkness. Then, thanks to the guncotton from France which connected all the candles, the altar, as if by magic, was suddenly ablaze with lights, its rich ornaments reflecting the brilliance of the candles. The decorations were the work of good Father Biehler, my companion for the past year, who had been inspired by the occasion to use all his talents.

There, beside the Holy Table, was the crib. Its roof was of paper made to simulate rocks with crevices which contained a little moss and tiny sprigs of fir. Inside the cave was the Infant Jesus, lying all alone on a little straw. The Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, in heaven, must have smiled on Him. Caribou Eaters and ourselves represented the shepherds as well as the ox and the donkey. Then, as we sang that sweet hymn of the angels that announced to the world the birth of the Saviour, the vaults of our "cathedral" resounded in the night with a tremendous *Gloria in excelsis Deo*.

Everyone sang; not perfectly in tune perhaps, but with the spirit of their burning faith. So much in their element were these

good Caribou Eaters that after the Mass one worthy woman came to tell me she had forgotten to receive Communion because she had been so carried away by the singing.

On coming out of chapel we held a great Christmas Eve feast, and — what a windfall! — the Hudson's Bay Company's clerk presented everyone with a little flour, tea, sugar and tobacco. Feasts don't happen every day, so we made the most of this one.

The faith of these good people was truly astonishing. Even those who could not come to the mission contrived to join us in spirit. And when the Great Bear marked midnight they gathered together in lodges usually set aside for their Sunday rosary and hymns but now specially adorned for the occasion. Then, led by the oldest and best educated among them, they said the rosary, preceded and followed by the Christmas hymns they all knew. In some of the camps, an old man may even have given a little sermon. I remember one telling me that he did so every Sunday, and adding, ingenuously: "They seem to listen to me and to like what I say because they all bow their heads, resting them on their hands, and no one stirs."

At two in the morning on the day following Christmas, after I had said Mass — the last I was to say among my dear Caribou Eaters — Brother Courteille harnessed my dogs, and in a temperature forty degrees below zero, I was on my way to the mission of the Nativity.

10: *All About My Caribou Eaters*



DEAR CARIBOU EATERS! When I came to leave them after twenty years of my life, a good part of my heart as man and priest was left behind.

I would like, here, to make a rapid sketch of their origins, traditions, language, character and customs.

Origin

The Caribou Eaters, *Ethsen eldeli dene*, belong to the great family of the Tinnahs (sometimes translated "he-men"), which comprises all the Indians of the Mackenzie basin. Ramifications of this race extend far into Alaska, the northern part of British Columbia, the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan and as far east as Churchill, Manitoba, on Hudson Bay. Vigorous offshoots are found in Mexico and the southwestern part of the United States, where they are well known today as Apaches and Navajos.

Mackenzie is the home of the Montagnais, the Yellow Knives, the Dog Ribs, Slaveys, Hares and Loucheux. At the foot of the Rocky Mountains there are also found the Sikinnis, the people of the "Bad Lands." Each tribe has its own fairly pronounced characteristics, and its own dialect, though all the dialects have a common origin.

It is now certain that the Tinnah peoples originated in Asia. My Caribou Eaters often told me how their ancestors once lived on another continent to the west. They migrated eastward during a year of great famine, crossing a strait by following the tracks of wolves which had gone in this direction. The wolves, they reasoned, had been starving and in fleeing from death like them-

selves, must have scented in the wind the presence of caribou herds afar off. The Indians, like the wolves, were not mistaken. They discovered such an abundance of caribou that they deemed it wise to remain in so fortunate a country.

This Asiatic origin of the Tinnehs, and of other American peoples, was for some time doubted by scholars interested in the history of America before its discovery by Christopher Columbus. They argued from written remains and from the ethnography of the native races of the New World. The scholars of various nations who belonged to this school were known as Americanists. At a congress held at Nancy, from the 19th to the 22nd of July, 1875, a definitive conclusion was reached.

I can hardly do better than quote Bishop Grouard, who as a simple Oblate priest was present at various sessions of the congress, along with another Oblate, Father Petitot.

"Several speakers had their say, and in view of the direction in which their ideas tended, it became clear to us that what they desired to establish was the autochthonous character of the American peoples and so contest the unity of the human race. M. de Rosny stood out prominently as the champion of this 'godless' theory. He boldly proclaimed his anti-Christian doctrine and took a lofty stand on the authority of Voltaire, 'whom,' as he held, 'one can always safely quote anywhere.'

"What Voltaire said was: 'Once God could create flies in America, why could he not have created men also?'

"Hence he wanted to establish on principle that the American peoples derived from America and nowhere else.

"M. de Rosny made his peroration with all the aplomb of a Paris professor, and concluded to the satisfaction of all who wished to establish a fact which seemed opposed to the truth of Christianity.

"Father Petitot then sought leave to speak. He urged the Bureau not to conclude too hurriedly that the Americans were autochthonous:

"'Because we do not have in Europe any document that can throw light on their origin, we should not conclude, without

further discussion, that they could not have come from Asia. I am not prepared at the moment to enter into the debate, but if anyone cares to listen to me tomorrow, I will bring my proofs.'

"There was some applause at this. 'So the Father wants war,' M. de Rosny exclaimed; 'very well, he shall have it.'

"At the next session, Father Petitot soon captured the audience's attention. When it was learned that he had spent thirteen years in the plains on the borders of the Arctic Ocean, among natives whose languages he knew so well as to publish dictionaries of them, when he promised to say nothing he had not seen with his own eyes or heard with his own ears, 'at last,' said one of my neighbors, 'here is something positive, not fantastic fiction or unsupported hypotheses!'

"The Reverend Father adduced cogent proofs, from the traditions and manners, beliefs, language and weapons of the Eskimos, that these people have a common origin with the Asiatics, and are therefore not autochthonous."

Next day he "resumed his notes on the analogies between the language of the Tinnehs and those of the peoples of Asia and Oceania, on the similarity of their observances to those of the Israelites, and on the conformity of their customs and traditions with those narrated in the Bible."

Finally, at the fourth and final session, "he confined himself to treating the question of Indian weapons, specimens of which he had brought with him to France. These he compared with the stone weapons preserved in the national museum at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. In the perfect resemblance to be found, both in material and shape, between the weapons and implements of different nations, he found new proof of the common origin of the human race."

His conclusion was that "the Americans are not an autochthonous race, but belong to the one human family of which all the peoples on earth are members."

It was a conclusion approved by the prolonged applause of the whole assembly.

Thus the Voltairians "had to witness the triumph of a poor missionary from Mackenzie."

Traditions

Among the traditions closely connected with the biblical narratives I would call attention particularly to one concerning the Flood. How often I have heard the following story related, even by children of eight or ten. In every sentence there occurs the word *sni* (they say), as a reminder that the story was handed down by those now dead.

"At that time, they say, only animals existed. They could talk, they say. One day the bear succeeded in shutting up all the warmth in a big vessel which he hung high up in the sky. Very soon, they say, lakes and rivers all froze. There was no more rain, only snow. The snow got so thick that at last it covered all the trees so that the animals could find nothing to eat.

"Then the animals got together to try to find a way of bringing warmth back to the earth. The beaver volunteered, and succeeded in climbing up to the vessel; then, they say, he gave it a good bite and suddenly warmth spread all over the earth. All the animals, they say, were happy. But soon, owing to the melting of the snow, the whole earth was flooded with water and all the animals perished. Three ducks and three drakes were all that were left alive. When they got tired of swimming over the water without finding anything to eat, they decided to search the land under the water. One of the drakes dived, they say, but returned to the surface without having found anything. A second did the same, they say, but also found nothing. The third, who was called '*ankk̄anle*,'¹ dived in his turn and stayed down a long time, they say. Suddenly he emerged with a piece of earth in his beak. The other ducks, they say, came at once and had a look. And behold, the earth which he brought up began to get bigger and bigger. That, they say, is how the islands were formed, and the continents too. The three drakes were turned into men, and the three ducks into women. And that, so they say, was the origin of all Tinnchs."

One day a Caribou Eater asked me abruptly:

¹ Pronounced with a rolled "r": *rankkale*. An onomatopoeia which is a good imitation of that aquatic bird, the loon (*harelda glacialis*).

"Do you know why the crow is black all over and can't sing?"
I said I had no idea.

"Well, we have a tradition about that, handed down from those who are dead."

"Let's hear it," I said.

"Once upon a time," he began, "the crow was the most beautiful of birds, they say. He had a lovely voice and sang better than all the rest. But he was proud and was always strutting about while he sang, despising the other birds. One day, they say, a big bird, tired of the sight and sound of him, contrived to seize him by the neck. Then, they say, he rolled him in charcoal and squeezed him so tight that the crow, half strangled, could only cry 'caw! caw!' That is why he is now black all over and can't sing any more."

"And what is this," he might have added, "but the fall of Lucifer?"

Of the Indian traditions collected by Father Petitot, I remember two that are particularly interesting.

The first, recounted by Lizette Khatchoti of the Hare tribe, has to do with the Creation:

"Inkfwîn-Wetay (He who dwells in the highest heavens) sent, in the beginning, his young men to make the earth. They stretched over the chaos something pliant, soft and silky, like elk skin. By this means they beautified the earth a little. After withdrawing this veil, they extended it a second time and the earth became still more beautiful. Then he sent his servants, three, four, five and six times, to do the same thing; and the earth was completed.

"We knew these things long before the French arrived. I was a tiny child when I was told them by my mother, and she had seen the first white men who ever appeared in our country. Well, my mother often told me: 'Inkfwîn-Wetay made the earth at the very beginning.' At that time we had never heard about God; the priests had not come and no one had told us."

The second tradition, current among the Dog Ribs and related by Yetta Netel at Great Bear Lake in 1868, concerned the origin of the world:

"In the beginning, old man Tchapewi had two sons. It was in

heathberry time, that is, in autumn. The old man said to his two sons: 'My children, here you see the fruits of this country I am giving you, vast quantities of them; live happily, increase and multiply, hunt where you will; the whole earth is open to you. But take good care to remember this: never eat white fruit (or, as we should say, 'green') because it will set your teeth on edge, and your children's teeth on edge, forever. You will eat only fruit that is black (ripe) and never go out at night.'

"So spoke old man Tchapewi. For a time his children obeyed him; but soon the command he gave them had the opposite effect. They conceived a great desire to break it. The younger brother reached out for the white fruit; both of them ate some and their teeth were set on edge.

"Then the old man, their father, became very angry with them. 'What,' he cried, 'you could not obey me in such an unimportant thing as that!' So he chased them far away and banished them to the little island called 'nan' (the earth), so that they might live there unhappily.

"From that time on, we have said that our fathers ate white fruit and the teeth of their children have been set on edge. It has become a proverb with us."

Language

No missionary, I think, has ever penetrated so far into the mysteries of native "cries" and the Montagnais language as Bishop Grouard. He said to me once:

"If I had no other proof of the existence of God, the knowledge of this language would be enough to make me believe it. Our Indians are not subtle enough to have invented it, and the combined efforts of all the white races would have been equally incapable."

Father Petitot observed that, in the essential and intrinsic construction of his language, the Indian always finds a new word to express a new object.

Before the white man arrived, the Indians had no conception of firearms. When the arms were introduced they immediately invented words to express gun, powder, shot and ball. And without

any previous understanding between them, they used the same words over an area of hundreds of miles.

The onomatopoeia *k̄k̄ezh*,² imitating the sound of a shot, provided them with the necessary root. Adding to it the personal prefix *es*, they had the verb *esk̄k̄ezh*, meaning I make the noise represented by the onomatopoeia. Adding to the verb the prefix *t'e*³ — which means “impulsion given,” “starting off” — they had the verb *t'es̄k̄k̄ezh*, or I let off the shot, or noise.

In the third person, the *e* of the personal prefix was replaced by an *l*; then by adding the suffix *i* — denoting an habitual action — they had the substantive *t'elk̄k̄ezhi*: that which makes the shot go off, or gun.

Then: *T'elk̄k̄izhi k'onen*: the powder of fire (*k'onen*) for the gun; *t'elk̄k̄ezhi zhaye*: the little lead for the gun (*zhaye* meaning small thing).

The following illustrates other examples of the Indians' method of inventing words to describe previously unfamiliar objects:

The only means of transport known to the Indians had been the sled for going by land and the canoe for going by water. When the first wagon appeared they called it a “sled on wheels”; the first railway wagon was a “sled moved by fire”; the first car, a “sled moved by oil”; the first steamer was a “fire-canoe”; the first motor vessel, an “oil canoe”; the first plane, a “flying canoe.”⁴

Character

I am often asked if the Indians are intelligent. A distinction should be made here between speculative and practical intelligence. We should hardly expect these poor savages, entirely uneducated as they are, to be versed in the subtleties of metaphysics. Yet are they lacking in speculative intelligence?

One of them said to me one day (and he was not the only one to confide in me this way):

² The pronunciation of *zh* is that of the English “th.”

³ The apostrophe represents the sound of a strongly rolled “r.”

⁴ For further information concerning the language of the Indians, see Appendix I.

"When I walk in the woods in search of game, I often wonder at the great trees, the plants of all kinds, the flowers, the fruits and the different animals, each with a life of its own; and when I see the rivers and lakes full of fish, when I watch the sun rise and set, and behold the moon and the stars, do you know what I say to myself? I say: all these could never move and grow by themselves. There is someone very mighty who has made them all and takes care of all things on the earth.

"So when Father Grollier came and told us of Him who is called *Ni-oltsi-ni*, 'he who made the earth,' I believed at once."

There are plenty of philosophers and scientists who are unable to reason as well as this.

Here is another example, a remark of my old friend Deaf Laurence:

"Before Father Grollier came we were medicine makers (sorcerers). We treated women just like toys, or else as beasts of burden; when our parents grew old, we abandoned them in the forest; we were afraid of death. When someone we loved died, there was crying and weeping for days on end.

"The first Praying Man came among us 'with empty hands.' He had, like you, his cross on his breast. A number of Praying Men came after him. They spoke to us of 'Him-who-made-the-earth,' who created us out of love, and loved us so much that he sent his Son to show us the way to Heaven. It was he who died on a cross to gain pardon for our sins and save us. We accepted the words of the Praying Man and also the commandments of 'Him-who-made-the-earth,' our Master and Father. We kept one wife and sent the others away. From then on, we treated them as companions, created, like us, to go to Heaven. And we had no more fear of death. It was hard for us to change our life and obey the Praying Man. But it was not just his words that changed us. If there had not been someone all-powerful to speak through his mouth, enlighten our minds and make our hearts strong, we would never have been able to do it, or be happy and at peace as we are now."

Further proof of this reasoning power came from my friend

Porcupine-Tooth. Originally he had belonged to that band of savages who live on the borders of the great plains and are noted for their "caribou mentality." Today, most of them know how to read and write in syllabic characters, and thanks to religious instruction their mentality has gradually improved.

Entering my room on one occasion Porcupine-Tooth caught sight of a summary of Sacred History on the table.

"That's a grand book," he declared with conviction, "it tells a lot of interesting stories."

It happened to be open at the passage about the meeting of Nicodemus with Our Lord.

"It took me a long time," he admitted, "to understand what Our Lord said to Nicodemus, but I got it in the end."

"Good," I said, "let me hear you explain it."

Thereupon my Caribou Eater gave a perfect explanation of how a man must be born again spiritually in order to have eternal life.

As for their practical intelligence, it is astonishing to see how ingenious they can be. I have already described to what good purposes they turn the caribou of the plains. And look at the little portable engines they now attach to their canoes. How quickly they learned the mechanism, and how skillfully they can make any necessary repairs with string, bits of rubber or leather thongs! Properly instructed they would soon be able, just as were our Eskimos, to pass on the lesson to many a white man.

If some of the braggarts who boast of civilization and modern inventions, as if these things were due solely to their own personal genius, were to be transported to the great plains and left in the middle of herds of caribou to fend for themselves with nothing but their intelligence and two hands, they would be only too glad, I fancy, to be rescued by a family of those savages they so loftily despise.

As another example of the practical intelligence of these Indians there is the case of Little-Thin-Ox. In the course of a sermon, I had been drawing the attention of my flock to the disastrous consequences of their habitual improvidence. Furs, as it hap-

pened, were extremely plentiful that year, so I suggested that this was the time to lay something by for the years of scarcity that were sure to follow, and put what they could in the bank.

Little-Thin-Ox, one of the chiefs, came to thank me for my advice and said how sorry he was that he had already spent all he had. "I have only fifty dollars left," he added sadly.

I pointed out that the sum of fifty dollars would make quite a good deposit with which to open an account. As more came in, all he need do was to entrust it to my keeping. Little-Thin-Ox handed over his fifty dollars and went away happy. The following week I had a letter from him in which he said he had been thinking a great deal about the advice I gave him, and regretted more and more having spent all his money.

"Lend me fifty dollars," he wrote. "I will put it into the bank, making a good hundred dollars in reserve, as you told us, against the bad times. Then I shall be very happy indeed."

Generally speaking, our Indians are like big children, but in dealing with them it is important not to show that one takes them for such. Their natural pride as Tinnehs would be mortally offended and one would immediately lose their confidence.

"They possess shrewdness," as Father Petitot wrote in his monograph on them, "and in a very marked degree that talent peculiar to children for appreciating oddities, for seizing upon weaknesses and ridiculous characteristics, and giving vent to their criticism with a cunning fire of jests and pleasantries."

Completely self-controlled in danger, they are unwearied travelers, summer and winter; they are patient in enduring hardships and often give proof of extraordinary stoicism. Providence has also endowed them with an amazingly retentive memory. I have seen our old Devil, when we have been wandering in search of timber, rediscover in the forest and follow for miles a path he had opened twenty years before and had never seen since.

They have also an extraordinary innate sense of direction, which develops through necessity because of their nomadic way of life. From the depths of some vast forest they can guide you, without apparent difficulty, to any particular lake, mountain or camp

which you have expressed an inclination to visit. Time and again I have had occasion to wonder at the precision with which, even on the darkest night, a mere youth, breaking trail, could cross a lake miles in length, unaided by any landmark strike the entry to the portage leading to the next lake.

Theft

Morally our Indians are honest enough; they have a horror of theft, lying and murder. All the nine years I spent at the Fond du Lac mission I never locked any door, inside or outside the house. And despite the fact that during my long absences, men, women and children had complete freedom of entry, I never discovered anything missing.

At the first thaw, they collected their snares, all along the hunting track, and hung them on the branches of trees. On the return of winter, they found them just where they had left them. It must be noted, however, that to take a piece of meat, even out of sheer greed, is not regarded as theft.

Lying

Their horror of lying is reflected in their very speech. They never make a statement without adding: *lessar* (probably).

Father de Chambeuil once asked old Devil if he would come to the mission after the breakup. He thought it over and then said solemnly:

"If I come, I will come probably; if I do not come, you will think: he has not come." All of which meant that his journey would depend on circumstances.

Yet, for all their sincerity, it is as well not to take all they say too literally. They are expert in the use of hyperbole, especially when talking of their illnesses and needs, and this above all in times of famine. Apart from being great hunters, they are also, generally speaking, beggars by nature, and extremely clever and tenacious ones too.

I must confess that since the arrival of the white men, some of whom had few scruples, lying and theft have begun to appear

among our Indians. There are some who pay back the whites in their own coin, and it would be wise today to keep one's closets and drawers locked.

Murder

Towards the end of the eighteenth century the Northwest Company built a trading post at Fond du Lac. The post was robbed and all members of the staff were massacred by Indians. In 1853, the Hudson's Bay Company reopened their post, this time successfully. A few natives from Fond du Lac had come to Fort Chipewyan, where they saw and heard Fathers Taché and Faraud, whose visits had aroused the enthusiasm of the Tinnehs for the word of "Him-who-made-the-earth."

Already these Tinnehs were attempting to practice the divine commandments, and on the return trip to Fond du Lac there was a place on the boat for Father Grollier. His soutane and Oblate's cross, together with his simplicity and kindness, made a great impression on the Caribou Eaters. Grace acted upon their simple souls, which had qualities not often found among savages. They accepted with fervor and joy the yoke of the Gospel which, among other things, imposed on them the obligation of respecting the lives and property of others.

Since that day, as far as I myself know, there has been no murder among our Caribou Eaters. The worst that is told is the case of one of them who wrenched an axe from the hands of a mad Indian who was about to kill his wife, and summarily struck him down. A white man would have done the same in similar circumstances.

The word *gratitude* does not exist in the Tinnah language, and I think I would be safe in saying that before the arrival of the missionaries the Indians had no idea of its meaning. A kind of benign communism presided over their mutual relationships. Everything, apart from arms, canoes and traps, belonged to the community. On receiving a present from any white men, all they could find to say was: *Sinniye assinla* (You have made me

happy). Little by little, as they came in contact with French half-breeds and missionaries, they adopted the French word *merci* (thanks), which to this day they still pronounce "*mar-ci*."

Though gradually, through the children brought up in our schools, they have come to understand gratitude, they had only a vague idea of its meaning when I was a missionary at Fond du Lac. One worthy old woman, to whom I had just made a present of a little tobacco, responded with a broad smile: "*Marci tcho' assinla*." The word *tcho'* means much or greatly, and the translation of the old woman's remark would be: "You have made me much or greatly thanks!" She meant simply that she was happy. But when I asked her how long her *marci tcho'* would last, she grinned and said, "As long as the tobacco."

Yet gratitude is something natural to the human heart. A delicate plant, it may for lack of favorable circumstances fail to bloom. Habits of religion, however, always facilitate its taking root and developing. For the human heart is made for love, and for loving what is lovable. Unless it be withered by the basest kind of selfishness, it will not long remain insensitive to repeated kindness. Once it has understood the love of the Creator who brought it into existence and the love of the Redeemer who died on the Cross to expiate its sins and open to it the gates of Heaven; once it compares its lot with that of so many others, fated never to hear the divine word; then it will be drawn to return love for love, and seek to please Him who has loved it so greatly. For does not he who loves, seek to give pleasure to the object of his love? And is not the surest way of giving pleasure to a friend to do what pleases him, not only by obeying his known wishes, but also by trying to anticipate them?

Thus, through the Gospel, gratitude came to be awakened in the hearts of our Caribou Eaters. When it was preached to them, they *recognized* how good was "He-who-made-the-earth," and how overwhelming His kindness to them. This act of *recognizing* benefits received led them to submit to the commandments as so many "beacons," lighting the sure way to Heaven, the dwelling place of eternal happiness. Love of God requires love for one's

neighbor. So much so that St. John warns us: "If anyone says, 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar."

When I came to leave Fond du Lac I received the most touching evidence of gratitude from my flock. One might well wonder how many white people would have had the courage to face a journey of eight or ten days on foot, camping out-of-doors in a temperature of thirty or forty degrees below zero, simply to give a friend a farewell handshake. But that is what all my Indians did. They came to express their gratitude—even some poor old women who could scarcely walk.

Another instance has been quoted by Father Duchaussois. It concerns an old medicine man called "Michael-Pointed-Back":

"Meeting him once in some camp, and feeling I should give him a lesson, I refused him my hand on entering a lodge. But when the meal was over and I was making ready to continue my journey, I held out my hand and said:

"'No ill will, Michael; I forgive you. But you made me sad by visiting the fort and not coming to see me. Now I am leaving the mission. I shall not see you any more, but every day I shall ask the Almighty to make your heart brave and good.' Three weeks later, Michael came to the mission to ask my pardon.

"'Ever since I saw you at Sideways Lake Camp,' he said, 'much water has flowed from my eyes. I could no longer rest at nights. When I walked in the woods, I said my rosary and asked God to show me what I should do to please you. It was an unfriendly thing to let you go with a sick heart because I had been bad. At last I found the answer. I harnessed my dogs as quickly as possible, and here I am! The Almighty has made me understand that the best way to give you pleasure is to confess all the sins of my life and behave in future as a good Christian.'

"He made his confession with touching humility and deep contrition and next morning he made a fervent Communion followed by a long thanksgiving.

"'My heart is happy,' he announced, on leaving the chapel with tears in his eyes. 'I feel I have pleased you. And the Almighty too is satisfied with me. I want to be good now. Pray for me so

that the Little Praying Man who takes your place may be able to say whenever he writes to you: Michael is living like a good Christian.'"

Manners and Customs

Superstitions used to have a very prominent place among our Caribou Eaters. The grossest of these have now almost disappeared. They concerned principally animals and women.

As far as animals are concerned, I have mentioned already that the caribou was in some respects held sacred. It was permissible to kill it for food or clothing, but to strike it with a wooden implement was a sacrilege that led to famine. I have described how, after hitting one with the butt of my carbine, the caribou nevertheless returned in greater numbers than ever during my last two years at Fond du Lac. They have continued to do so. Has this led to my Caribou Eaters abandoning their superstition? Possibly, in some cases. But as far as the majority is concerned, I doubt it.

A good number of Indians had some animal taboo; perhaps as a consequence of some sort of vow or contract. A hunter never killed, or even injured, a beast that was taboo and in return he expected the animal to protect him as a friend.

A fact worth noticing, incidentally, is that the animal that was taboo was never one of much commercial value. It might be a muskrat, perhaps, or a weasel. I have never heard of a fox, for instance, or a beaver, being regarded by any Indian as taboo.

In regard to women the most absurd ideas were current. They were forbidden to eat the snout of an elk or the head of a caribou, these choice portions being reserved for the hunters. A woman had to be careful not to step over any garment belonging to her husband, otherwise the poor man would have been afflicted with pains in the head. If she chanced to step over a gun or a snare, these objects became accursed. The huntsman could use them no more. She had to take constant precautions so as not to soil either the articles spread on fir branches in the lodge, or the provisions, clothes and tools of various kinds always heaped in the canoe.

The most typical incident I witnessed happened among the Montagnais at Fort Resolution, though the same thing, I have no doubt at all, might have occurred among my own Caribou Eaters in similar circumstances.

We had just built a new boarding school. To reduce the cost of heating what one might call our parish church, we had fitted up in one of the aisles a chapel large enough to serve the public on ordinary Sundays throughout the winter season. At that time of the year almost all the hunters were occupied, with their families, in the pursuit of caribou and fur-bearing animals.

From the outside, a big stairway gave access directly to the chapel, and there was a double landing which made it easier to climb. Inside, above the door, was a platform reserved for the Sisters and the older schoolgirls who made up the choir. When the Montagnais heard about this, there was considerable consternation among the men. If they had known of the Caudine Forks, all without exception would have gladly submitted to them, rather than pass beneath that platform. Just imagine it . . . A Montagnais to have women over his head! Ah, never!

The day for the opening of the chapel was fixed and on the Sunday before I notified our people. Being resolved to kill this superstition at once, I added: "Those who, for fear of catching a headache or some other ill, do not come to Mass that day will find themselves refused Communion at Christmas."

The same day, Chief Vital Marrow came to ask me to make an exception in favor of his wife. She was old and walked with difficulty. Could I allow her to enter the chapel by the inner stairway used by the community, thereby avoiding that dreaded platform? Naturally, the chief would accompany his wife.

Even though I felt some compassion for the condition of the latter, I was nonetheless resolved to stand firm. The outside stairway had been expressly constructed in such a way as to make it easy for the infirm to climb it. It was not steep, and two banisters provided firm support all the way up. Finally, halfway up, there was a wide landing, which provided an excellent opportunity for recovering one's breath. And the result? All the women,

including Madame Marrow, were present at Mass. All the men, except for two or three oldsters, had gone hunting with their chief, two or three days before. They did not return till the middle of the following week.

One plucky youngster braved the superstition. "For five years," he argued, "I stayed at school. The boys were on the ground floor. We had the nuns and the girls above us every day. That did not prevent my killing two fine silver foxes last winter. And I'm hoping to kill some more next winter." He did so, and at the same time killed the superstition too.

For the most part, the Caribou Eaters lived in bands consisting of a number of families, either related or on friendly terms. Among them they had more or less a community of goods. The product of the hunt belonged to everyone. Thus many unfortunates were protected against famine and often death.

These families grouped themselves about a chief whose authority was accepted by all. He was not always the most intelligent of the band, but, what was more important, he *was* the best hunter. In times of shortage, they knew they could rely on him as long as there were trails to be followed within a radius of thirty or forty miles. But obedience was insisted upon. The young men in particular had to jump to it instantly. Otherwise the sanction immediately applied was that recommended by St. Paul: "If any man will not work, neither let him eat."

It was the chief, when the time came, who gave the order to break camp. It was he, too, who decided in which direction to migrate, and where to settle again, with the best chance of finding the game so necessary to the livelihood of all.

In each family, the father enjoyed the same authority. There was no disputing with him. To every sentence he uttered, all must reply "*Hein!*," meaning "Yes," even when the opinion he expressed was not to everyone's taste.

A man's primary occupation was to provide a livelihood for his family, either by hunting or trapping. He employed his leisure, when the need was pressing, in making sleds or repairing

the snowshoes required by his family. But he usually waited till the last minute before doing so. He preferred to go and smoke a convivial pipe in some neighboring tent.

However, when provisions were exhausted and game scarce, his task was no easy one. He had to go great distances in pursuit of a trail, sometimes without any food at all and for several days on end. His endurance of hunger and fatigue was then admirable, as was his tenacity in pursuit of elusive game. But most admirable was his devotion to the welfare of his family. In times of prolonged famine, it was generally he, while still at his task, who was the first to collapse and die before any other member of his family.

The woman's function was more complicated: she prepared the meals, and carted, or carried on her back, the wood required for heating. She made and repaired clothes, including the footwear of the entire family. Hers was the job, assisted by the children and dogs, to go in search of the big game which the hunter, after killing, would leave casually in the forest; hers, too, to cut up the meat and fish, and dry them. When camp had to be broken, it was the woman who dismantled the tent, transported it with the rest of the baggage, and pitched it again on the site chosen for the new camp, while her husband sprawled about and smoked his pipe, resting after the labor of carrying his gun.

The woman, in a word, was a general slave. She accepted her lot with admirable patience and resignation. The least sign of rebellion on her part would result in a beating. Once on the slopes of the Rocky Mountains, Bishop Grouard came across some unfortunate women whose noses had been cut off for disobedience.

At the time I arrived at Fond du Lac these barbarous customs were gradually falling into disuse. Yet I myself have seen a poor woman dragging, or pushing with a stick, a sled too heavy for the half-starved dogs that were trying to draw it. A child was seated on top of the load. With a cord about her neck, the woman was hauling a smaller sled bearing a second child wrapped in caribou skins. Her youngest, a baby, she carried in a shawl attached to her shoulders by a leather thong. What was her husband

doing? He was far away at the head of the dogs, gun on shoulder and pipe in mouth.

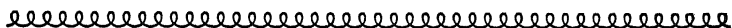
The small boys — *teneyu*: “man-stuff” — as soon as they could walk were gradually initiated into the secrets of hunting with bow, trap and snare, and later, with rifle and carbine. As future hunters, they were held in high esteem. On the other hand, young girls, whom their fathers and even their mothers called by the same name as their dogs, were, without pity or consideration, made to perform the slave labor that was to be their lot for the rest of their lives.

The influence of Christianity has triumphed over these barbarian customs. The story of the Virgin Mary, chosen by God to be the mother of His own Son, loved and respected by her husband Joseph and entrusted by the dying Saviour to His beloved disciple, has so impressed these savages that they have come to understand the sacred place of woman in the family, and to accept her as an equal who, like themselves, can be baptized, receive the “bread of the Almighty,” and at the last, enter with them into the Kingdom of Heaven.

The transformation is now so complete that woman has become man’s loved and respected companion. Little girls are made much of as gifts from Heaven, and the most attractive clothes and the best food are often reserved for them.⁵ It is not unusual, nowadays, to see a Caribou Eater in his Sunday best, leading a sled in which his wife and little daughters ride in snug comfort.

⁵ In the old days, though respecting the authority of their parents, girls had something to say in the choice of their husbands. The appearance of the young man was of less interest than his skill as a hunter. In the young man’s mind, a woman’s beauty had nothing to do with the purity of her life before her marriage. It was enough that she should be submissive, hard-working and skilful, chubby and healthy. All the rest mattered little. In short, a boy or a girl, however ill-favored, could always find a mate if he or she was capable of working and feeding a family. With very rare exceptions, they were also faithful to one another.

II: *I Go to Be Made Bishop*



MY CONSECRATION as bishop was to take place at St. Albert, a journey of five hundred miles over terrain marked by numerous forests, rivers and lakes, where the temperature was usually thirty to forty degrees below zero. I was not feeling strong enough to drive the dogs myself, so I handed over the whip to the faithful Albert Robillard and lay in the sled swathed in blankets.

Baggage and rations presented a very serious problem. We had some dried meat, a few *galettes*, a chunk of lard, and by way of reserve a few dried fish for the dogs. But the latter were accustomed to frozen fish and it was essential to bring this also. They could never last out a lengthy journey without this more substantial fodder.

For safety's sake we harnessed five dogs to each sled. The daily ration for each was to be three fish, weighing two pounds or so each. This meant thirty pounds of fish per sled, or sixty for the two. Therefore, for a journey of ten days at least, it was necessary to provide no less than six hundred pounds. A few extra rations, too, would have to be stowed away to meet any emergency. If we added to all this our cooking kit, the axes needed for making camp and the bedding and personal baggage of three travelers—I will not mention the person of the bishop-elect—the load on our sleds might well have caused us to hesitate.

With a view to helping Albert, whose own sled was burdened with all the provisions and impediments, Brother Leroux, who was to accompany me, stowed in mine a few frozen fish in addition to my personal effects. These served me as a good mattress.

By a stroke of luck, our party was reinforced by Colin Fraser,

a free trader from Fort Chipewyan, and one of his sons, Fred or Roderick. We now had three sleds. These took turns breaking the trail and so relieved our dogs. Moreover, there were now five of us to help pitch camp; this saved work and time, apart from enlivening our evening's conversation.

Our friend Fraser described to us, with all a half-breed's animation, his adventures in Indian camps, trading for furs in competition with the men of the Hudson's Bay Company, and in particular with Pierre Mercredi, a métis like himself. The smart thing was to arrive in the camp first, with a sled loaded with the most attractive articles. The day and the hour of setting out were always kept secret by the competitors but inevitably one or the other of them arrived too late and had to withdraw empty-handed, swearing, rather belatedly, that he would not be caught again. Many was the trick Colin Fraser had thus played on his old friend Pierre Mercredi, and vice versa. But whenever they met, they would joke and chaff at one another's expense, for the time had passed when competing traders resorted to fighting, or even murder, to settle their differences.

If all fur traders put as much energy and perseverance into the business of saving their souls as they do into the pursuit of furs they would all be saints. Bishop Grandin often remarked, in appealing for recruits to the missions: "Not a wolf's tail is ever lost in the whole of our Far North, but how many souls are, for want of apostles to win them to our dear Saviour!"

Many Montagnais Indians, who had come to Fort Chipewyan to trade their furs and join in the Christmas festivities, had now returned to their respective camps. These were pitched in the forest at regular intervals all along the Athabasca River. We therefore found the track freshly broken. Hardened by the sleds that had gone before, it would have been easier going for the dogs had it not been for the intense cold. From the hideous grating sound made by our birch-plank sleds, anyone might have thought some malign spirit was at work, spreading a fine layer of sand on the hard-frozen snow. Luckily we had excellent dogs, and no less excellent drivers.

How should I occupy my time all day long, stretched full length on the planks that formed the base of the sled? Sometimes it was necessary to clear a passage among the blocks of ice with an axe. And what excitement in the forest! It was then especially that, lying in the sled, I congratulated myself on having a driver like Brother Leroux. Keeping his place on the back of the sled and holding on to the rope attached to the front, he had to perform all kinds of exploits with his feet, leaning all his weight first on one then on the other, to prevent the sled's being smashed against a tree or overturned, with its passenger, into the snow. The danger was made all the greater by the dogs' brisk pace.

Even more care was required in the *muskegs* or swamps, peopled by what are called, somewhat facetiously, "women's heads." These were lumps of turf or moss, rising out of the water, on which tufts of tall grass had taken root. Nothing could have been less agreeable than traveling over these protuberances; though strangely enough, the dogs seemed to delight in putting on an extra spurt in these places, as if to exaggerate the antics of our vehicle and its occupants.

It was delightful, however, especially at night, to be drawn over the lakes when the ice was smooth, the weather fine and clear, and not too cold for one's nose to emerge from the blankets. In these northern latitudes the atmosphere was so clear that the stars and moon looked enormous and brilliant. In their light the landscape stood out sharply against the sky. At times the *aurora borealis* seemed to set the heavens on fire: it is impossible to imagine a more thrilling sight!

But I see I have not answered my question: what to do all day, lying full length in a sled . . . ?

Just as it was impossible to say Mass out-of-doors in camp, the cold on this trip — thirty, forty, and sometimes even fifty degrees below zero — did not permit me to recite my office, or do any reading, spiritual or otherwise. Whenever Brother Leroux had the opportunity, he came and sat a few minutes on the heap of baggage at the back of the sled. Then after lighting a pipe, he and I would discuss the principal events of the past year in their

mission, fishing and hunting, or the dogs. But my chief occupation consisted of a few meditations and the saying of the rosary. Then, overcome by fatigue, I would drift into sleep, interrupted all too soon by one of the numerous incidents or accidents of the journey. Occasionally I contrived to build, and also demolish, some wonderful castles in the air. In this way and with a couple of stops each day for building a fire and cooking our meals, time passed quickly enough.

Half an hour or more before the time for a meal, my friend Colin Fraser and I would alight from the sleds to stretch our legs. The drivers took our places while they were still warm and went on ahead so as to have tea made by the time we came up.

The meal over, our companions returned the cooking gear to its place, gave the dogs each a piece of half-thawed fish, fixed the harness and replaced, where necessary, the little sacklike shoes which our dogs wore to prevent the forming of icicles between or under their toes. Meanwhile, Colin and I, wearing snowshoes if necessary, went ahead to get warm, and sometimes succeeded in walking a full hour before being rejoined by our respective sleds. After five fine days of cold dry weather, we arrived at the Fork, the confluence of the Athabasca and Clear Water rivers, where Fort McMurray had grown up.

It was another five days from Fort McMurray to Lac la Biche. This was once the starting point of caravans to the Far North to which the yearly supplies were conveyed in wagons drawn by horses or oxen across the prairies from the Red River. These supplies, stored in a big shed which is still there, were then forwarded, on the coming of spring, to their final destination by way of the La Biche River, a tributary of the Athabasca with extremely dangerous rapids. At Lac la Biche there was a large community, with a farm which supplied flour for the Mackenzie missions. There too, the Grey Sisters had a very successful school.¹

We were now no more than 150 miles from Edmonton. The

¹ The Grey Nuns, or Sisters of Charity of Montreal, arrived at Lac la Biche on August 26, 1862. In spite of countless difficulties they persevered in their task till 1898, when they moved to Lac la Telle. In 1904, the Lac la Biche convent was

last stage of our journey took us to the rectory at Lamoureux, near Fort Saskatchewan, where I was greeted by a secular priest, the Abbé Dorais. He kindly offered to drive me to Edmonton, so we set off in his fine *cuttin*, a small light sled, drawn by young, fresh horses, and were there that evening.

At the door of St. Joachim's rectory, we were received by Father Adrien Leduc, the superior of the house. The sight of my big caribou hood, completely hiding my soutane (which incidentally was tucked up to the girdle), and my big cap of long-haired bear-skin, reminiscent of the *têtes de loup* used in the old days in France to remove cobwebs from the ceiling, gave the good Father a start which he could not conceal.

"May I introduce," said the Abbé Dorais to him, "Monseigneur Breynat, the Bishop of Adrumetum."

At this we burst into laughter and embraced as though we had known each other for years. Then, taking possession of my cap, he cried, "May I keep this as a souvenir of our meeting?"

I readily agreed and he promised me a fine new hat in return.

taken over by the Daughters of Jesus from Kermaria, who devote themselves to the education of children and hospital work. Since then they have been educating the children of whites and half-breeds in this region and its immediate neighborhood. Their efforts have been crowned with the most encouraging success.

12: Consecration

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ST. ALBERT is situated some ten miles northwest of Edmonton. I was eager to get there, and obtain the blessing of the saintly Bishop Grandin. I found him confined to his bed, his health undermined by a pitiless and unrelenting malady. After embracing me he gave me his blessing and we talked. How much I owe to the intimate confidences I exchanged with him then!

Monseigneur Grandin was the first bishop to visit our missions in the Far North, making the journey at the cost of much toil and hardship. In an extremely moving letter, addressed to his superior general and written with great humility, he has left an account of this apostolic visit which lasted no less than three years.<sup>1</sup> He saw all the missions and came to know the missionaries, their mode of living, their hardships, the difficulties of their ministry, and the dangers of their solitary life and journeyings. He studied also the mentalities of the different tribes and the best ways of helping them.

Whether in the midst of these travels or the duties of his ministry, whether laboring with his hands or attending to the thousand cares of his office, he seemed able to draw upon spiritual reserves of strength, patience and courage. He was the perfect model of an Oblate missionary. How fortunate for me to be able to profit by the experience of this holy man!

Father Merer, the superior of the community at St. Albert, realized that my health left much to be desired and, with the encouragement of Bishop Grandin, did everything possible to

<sup>1</sup> Extracts will be found in the life of Bishop Grandin by Father E. Jonquet, O.M.I.



restore it. He detailed Sister Lavoie, from the neighboring convent of Grey Nuns, to take care of me under the supervision of Aristide Blais, a young doctor who had recently come from France.

By agreement with Archbishop Langevin and Bishop Grouard, the date of my consecration was fixed for April 6. But now, in spite of all the care bestowed upon me, I felt my strength steadily failing as the day drew nearer. No doubt dread of episcopal responsibilities had something to do with it and when the ceremony was only a fortnight off I decided to tender my resignation to Bishop Grandin.

He strove to dissuade me, but after some minutes, seeing he was failing to shake my resolve, he said in a tone I shall never forget:

"You have no right to refuse this office. It is God who has called you to it and you must obey."

I could only submit and asked him to pray for me. When this holy bishop comes to be canonized, I shall swear in all sincerity that it was his prayers which enabled me, in spite of constantly wavering health, to carry out my task for forty years.

I would like to quote from the letter addressed by our venerable founder, Bishop de Mazenod, to Father Vital Grandin, when telling him of his elevation to the episcopate. Its recipient must have pondered it often, for the arguments of his superior general are almost word for word those which he himself had used to silence my objections.

It is dated January 8, 1858:

" . . . I can see you, at this, prostrate on the ground, shedding tears and humbly rejecting the episcopal hat which is to be set upon your head. But be sure of this: it is imposed on you by obedience. You will find it, moreover, amid the difficult labors of your ministry, more like Our Lord's crown of thorns than any imperial diadem of this world. You are bishop by the will of the Head of the Church and mine, your superior general; you can count on God's grace and assistance.

"For you, the episcopate has become the way of salvation; it is by this that you will increase in holiness as time goes on, and the

fruits of your ministry will become more and more abundant. Arise from your despondency and rejoice in the Lord, for the episcopate, coming to you thus, is truly for you the *bonum opus* of which the Apostle speaks in his wonderful Epistles . . . ”

In order to be less distracted by the arrival of guests for the consecration ceremony, I made my preparatory retreat with our good neighbors, the Grey Sisters, who gave me a very comfortable room beside the infirmary. All my meditations, I confess, turned on the single theme of the Cross. In this I found consolation and a better understanding of the grace that was being offered me, and I made the firmest resolutions to overcome my weakness and fulfil the obligations of my new office.

An episode that amused us considerably at the time involved Sister Lavoie who was as concerned about what I should wear for the consecration as she had been about my health. When I was trying on my violet soutane, she noticed that I was still wearing ordinary moccasins. I can still see her look of consternation, and hear her saying:

“Do you mean to say you have no other shoes for tomorrow’s ceremony?”

“Why no, my dear Sister, I’m afraid I have not.”

At that late hour, all the shops were closed but something had to be done about my shoes. So, Sister Superior was summoned, and presently withdrew with Sister Lavoie. “Monseigneur,” I heard her saying, “has quite a small foot . . . ”

Fifteen minutes later they returned with a fine pair of shoes they had found among those kept in store for the Sisters of the community. They insisted that I try them on. Jokingly I did so, and to my great surprise they fitted as though they had been made to measure.

Fittingly, my consecrator was to be Bishop Grouard, who had ordained me ten years before. My fellow-countrymen, Bishops Clut and Pascal, were to be co-consecrators. Like me, both of them had been “Caribou Eaters,” and had long beards. Bishop

Grouard too had a fine one. All four of us, our beards surmounted by mitres, must have made an impressive spectacle!

Two of my old classmates in the scholasticates of Bleyerheide and Liège acted as chaplains. Monseigneur Adélarde Langevin, archbishop of St. Boniface, presided over the ceremony. Monseigneur Augustin Dontenville, bishop of New Westminster, and Monseigneur Legal, coadjutor of St. Albert, both of them Oblates, each had a prie-dieu in the sanctuary. But Bishop Grandin was not well enough to leave his room.

At ten o'clock, with bells ringing, the episcopal procession entered the old cathedral completely rejuvenated now by the decorating efforts of the good Grey Sisters. And as the procession moved along, a great crowd of the faithful knelt to receive the bishops' blessing.

Father Leduc, the vicar-general, read the pontifical letters announcing the nomination of the new bishop of Adrumetum and authorizing his consecration. Then came the canonical examination, the profession of faith and the rest of the ceremonies provided for in the ritual. The students from the seminary made orderly and devout servers, and the singing of the liturgy did credit to the choir of the Youville convent.

After the Gospel came two sermons. The first, in English, was given by Father Drummond, S.J., professor of philosophy in the Jesuit College at St. Boniface, and distinguished for his preaching throughout Canada. Next came a sermon in French by Bishop Pascal who had long been a missionary among the Indians.

At the end of the ceremony, a *Te Deum* was sung, and the new bishop, crozier in hand and mitre on head, accompanied by the assistant consecrators, passed through the ranks of the faithful. As he raised his hand, the crowd, deeply moved, knelt to receive his blessing. On returning to the altar, he gave his consecrator the liturgical greeting: *Ad multos annos!* Then the procession re-formed for the return to the bishop's palace. But before crossing the threshold the seven prelates, turning to the village lying at the foot of the nearby valley, blessed the faithful, the parish and the whole diocese of St. Albert.

"Then," wrote the chronicler of the celebration, "all made their way to the venerable invalid, Bishop Grandin, who, humble as ever, bowed before the upraised hand of the young Bishop of Mackenzie. The latter, in his turn, asked for, and received, the blessing of the dean of the Canadian episcopate."

The bishops of the province of St. Boniface took the opportunity of our meeting at St. Albert to have several private conferences. At one of these it was agreed that a letter — which I had the honor of drafting — be sent to the superior general of the Oblates. In it we described how the unprecedented development of the country had made it imperative that reinforcements, in the form of money and missionaries, be sent us without delay; otherwise, we explained, the good work already achieved by our predecessors and ourselves would go undeveloped and wither away. "... Very Reverend Father," the letter concluded, "we, the bishops of this province, realize that only our own Congregation can, properly and with true understanding, come to our aid. Therefore, we beg you, to renew your efforts for the sake of the thousands of souls who desperately need our help in this almost forsaken part of the world."

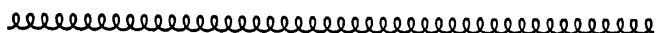
The effort was made. Forty years later (in 1942) there were more than 560 priests of the Congregation in the Canadian West. Many succumbed to the rigors of their task. In the cemetery of St. Albert alone nearly a hundred of them are sleeping their last sleep.

Since the arrival of the first Oblates at St. Boniface in 1845, and up to 1942, our Congregation has given to the Church of the West twenty-six bishops, of whom twelve died in harness, five had to retire and nine were still (in 1942) on the active list.

Among these last the most illustrious was His Eminence Cardinal Villeneuve (since dead) who was the first Bishop of Gravelbourg in Saskatchewan. His Holiness Pope Pius XI declared publicly that he had raised him to the cardinalate in recognition of the services rendered by the Oblate missionaries in the founding and organizing of the churches in the Canadian West.

One might well indeed wonder about the fate of these now flourishing churches if the Oblates had not responded to the desperate appeal of Bishop Provencher in 1845, and if, in face of the difficulties which confronted them later on, they had not persevered in their task.

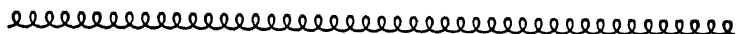
## II



*A TRAVELER  
FOR CHRIST*



### 13: *I Take Possession of the Mackenzie*



NOMINALLY, titular bishop of Adrumetum, I was charged with administering as vicar apostolic, in the name of the Holy See, that vast area divided by the Rocky Mountains into two clearly marked districts, the Mackenzie and the Yukon. The boundaries fixed by the Holy See extended from the 60th parallel to the North Pole, and from 102° longitude in the east to the borders of Alaska in the west. On the mainland alone this meant an area of about 889,000 square miles.

The district of Mackenzie was named after the "king of the rivers of the North" which Alexander Mackenzie discovered in 1789. This river, one of the eight largest in the world (2,525 miles in length), is second only to the Mississippi on the North American continent.

At the time I took over my duties in 1902, the only inhabitants, apart from the agents of the Hudson's Bay Company and the missionaries, were four or five thousand Indians of the Tinné family, thirteen to fifteen hundred Eskimos and a few hundred half-breeds. Among the Indians whose history, customs and language have been treated in an earlier chapter, each tribe had its own dialect, rather closely resembling that of the neighboring tribe. Among the Eskimos there were only two or three dialects. As to the half-breeds, nearly all of whom were of French origin, most of them spoke French and English with equal fluency and could understand if not speak all the native languages.

Then, as now, the Indians and Eskimos spent their days and nights during the winter hunting animals for fur using wooden traps made locally, imported snares, nooses of leather thongs or



high-caliber rifles. In 1902 the Eskimos in the east knew nothing of firearms and there was no trading in furs. The product of the chase was bartered in the Hudson's Bay Company's stores, or in those of its more recent rival, Hislop and Nagle. Tea and tobacco were regarded as essential commodities as were powder and shot. Flour and sugar had become plentiful. Our people profited by this to the best of their ability, but too often their judgment was vitiated by improvidence, gluttony or vanity.

The climate in the Mackenzie district is generally more moderate than its latitude would lead one to think. Summer is remarkable for its long sunny days, with its mean temperature at 55° Fahrenheit. It is in fact one continuous day for three months on end, for there is still light during the short period when the sun is below the horizon. Dusk and dawn are indistinguishable. To the north of the Arctic Circle there is the wonder of the midnight sun, which, on the Arctic Red River, never sets for forty days. The vegetation there knows no nightly interruption, and hence, as far north as Good Hope, only a few miles from the Arctic Circle, one can cultivate gardens that are the admiration of tourists.

Even the winter months have a certain charm of their own, the cold is so dry and the atmosphere so pure. Then too there are the "northern lights" in all their rich and varying brilliance. In midwinter the thermometer, though generally oscillating between 25° and 35° below zero, often drops to 40° or 50°, but rarely below 60°.

In 1902 the Mackenzie district was administered by the Northwest Company which had its headquarters at Regina and took very little interest in it. In 1905 that part of the Territories of the Northwest between 60° latitude and the United States border was divided into the two provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta. All land north of 60° latitude then formed what were called the non-organized territories of the Northwest and came under the jurisdiction of the federal government at Ottawa.

For the first few years after the changeover took place, the Ottawa government concerned itself no more with these northern

regions than had the Regina administration before. No one thought of complaining and things went on no worse than before.

The 1905 amendment to the Northwest Territories Act did, however, provide for the administration of the territories not included in the new provinces by the establishment of a commissioner for the Northwest Territories, to be named by the governor general in council. The same Act provided that when circumstances required it the commissioner should be assisted by a council of four members.

The first commissioner for the Northwest, named in conformity with this Act, was Lieutenant Colonel White, who was also controller of the Northwest Mounted Police. In practice the administration was in the hands of the police.

At the beginning of 1921, after the discovery of oil at Fort Norman, the four councillors were named in accordance with the Act of 1905. On June 4 following, the number of councillors was raised to six. The same amendment provided that one of the councillors should act as sub-commissioner.

Finally the Northwest Territories Act in 1927 placed the government of the territories in the hands of a commissioner, a sub-commissioner and five councillors.

At the time of its foundation the Mackenzie vicariate counted twelve missions, most of them the creation of Father Grollier, a single boarding school with some forty pupils, but no hospital. Of these twelve missions, only four had churches: Fort Resolution, Fort Providence, Fort Norman and Fort Good Hope. The others had simple chapel-houses. They were all built of trees squared up in the forest and brought to the sites by dogs. The total personnel of the missions numbered twelve priests, all Oblates of Mary Immaculate, thirteen lay brothers of the same congregation and some ten nuns, Sisters of Charity or Grey Sisters of Montreal.

Since 1895 the vicariate had possessed a sixty-foot steamer, the *Saint-Alphonse*, which ensured the annual provisioning of

the missions. Funds came from the societies of the Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Childhood. The Ottawa government made an annual contribution of four hundred dollars to help us feed and clothe the forty children in the boarding school at Fort Providence, or ten dollars per child per year, less than a dollar a month.

Every mission, with the exception of the Arctic Red River post, cultivated a small garden which provided potatoes, turnips, cabbages, carrots, and other vegetables. The Providence mission school had a farm and a few head of cattle to furnish milk, butter and a little meat. The farm, in addition to potatoes and the usual vegetables, also grew barley for soup and a kind of coffee.

I was anxious to make contact, as soon as possible, with the missionaries of my vicariate, who, in 1902, were separated from one another by distances of 150 to 200 miles. Father Husson arranged for and organized boats and crews and they were ready at Tawattina by the beginning of May. The cargo was soon aboard and we began our journey down the Athabasca River.

With the water high, navigation was easy. We rode the rapids and cascades without any mishaps and the voyage was completed in less than the usual time. So much so that when we arrived at the mouth of the river the ice still blocked our access to the lake.

As I was in a hurry, I thought it best to go on in advance. Taking a canoe and a good rower I set out to go around the ice, along the shore. It was a long and arduous task, and several short portages were necessary. Finally by afternoon, and not without difficulty, I reached a small bay free of ice, half a mile from the Nativity mission at Fort Chipewyan.

I climbed the rocks that separated me from the boarding school, the first house on my journey, and rang the bell. There was great excitement among the crowd of children and their teachers. The previous January before my departure Sister Sainte-Angèle, the Superior, had promised me a big reception when I returned from my consecration. Her pleasure at seeing me now did not completely conceal her disappointment at being taken by surprise. However, the church bell was rung and pealed

out vigorously to alert the population all of whom turned out, including the mission's twenty dogs which tried to see which one of them could bark the loudest. In the evening, surrounded by the Fathers and Brothers, I received the greeting of the children. This was on May 15, 1902.

On the 18th I confirmed some of the children; then, on the 21st, the ice having partially cleared, I re-embarked in my canoe, taking with me as my companion a half-breed, Charles Sanderson. On the evening of the next day we found ourselves opposite St. Mary's mission at Smith Landing. The sight of a canoe on the river, so soon after the breakup, attracted a crowd of children to the bank. As soon as they recognized me, they rushed off to tell Father Brémont. But I had already landed when he arrived with his gun to fire off the usual salute. Being short-sighted he failed to see me and I had to give him a prod, whereupon we embraced. . . . I had not seen the good Father since he left Fond du Lac in 1893.

At Fort Smith, where the St. Isidore mission stands only a mile from the southern boundary of the Mackenzie vicariate, the surprise of Father Dupire was even greater when I entered his kitchen, without knocking, to find him girt with an apron, kneading dough for the *galettes* he was about to cook. Uttering one of his good honest guffaws, he threw his hands in the air — they were covered with dough, but what of that? — and fell into my arms. It was thus that I made my first appearance among the missionaries of my vicariate. So far I was still in the Athabasca vicariate, of which Bishop Grouard remained vicar apostolic.

After a visit of thanksgiving to the Blessed Sacrament, I returned to sit with good Father Dupire, whose hands were back in the dough, and gave him news of the "great world." There were no Indians in the neighborhood. They were all at Salt River, some twenty miles away, busy laying in a supply of salted fish that would have to feed both them and their dogs during the winter. Under such circumstances there was no point in prolonging our visit.

Charles Sanderson agreed to go on with me as far as Fort

Resolution, two hundred miles away. We needed to make haste so as to arrive before the *Eva*, the Hislop and Nagle Company's steamer, left her winter quarters for Fort Smith to collect the annual supplies for the company's trading posts. Below the Fort Smith rapids, the stream becomes the Slave River and navigation was extremely easy: no rocks in mid-stream, no rapids to shoot, and a strong current of three or four miles an hour. The weather was perfect and we traveled day and night. Consequently, by the following midday we were some fifty miles from Fort Resolution, where, on rounding a point, we caught sight of the *Eva*, bound for Fort Smith. A day earlier and we would have found her at her base.

What was I to do with my companion? There was no time for hesitation. It would save time, I thought, to seize this opportunity and send him back, and then continue my voyage alone. I knew nothing about the river, but what of that?

"You have nothing to be afraid of," said Brother O'Connell, whom I found on the steamer on his way to Fort Smith to collect our boat the *Saint-Alphonse*, which had been put up for the winter there. "All you have to do is to go straight ahead. Just follow the stream; take the first branch to the right and you will get there without any trouble at all."

I pointed out that there was a headwind blowing up.

"It's all right," he continued, "lash your canoe to that drifting fork of a fir tree over there. It will keep you in the stream and you won't have to row."

I faithfully followed his instructions, but the wind increased to a gale and soon fir tree and canoe were being driven toward the shore. I cut adrift and sought refuge on an island that seemed to promise safe shelter. My only visitor there was a duck. As evening came on I pitched my little tent. Shortly after midnight I set up my portable altar on four posts and celebrated Holy Mass. Then I continued on my way. The wind was less violent, but it was still blowing. Sometimes the shifting of the current allowed me to hoist the sail, but mostly I had to row, munching from time to time a piece of dried meat to keep up my strength, and drinking a little water scooped up from the river.

At length, late in the afternoon, I reached the river's mouth. So far so good, but at the end of the point facing me the surface of the ice still extended to the shore. It was no good attempting that side. What was I to do now? Suddenly I remembered having heard that somewhere in the bay there was a little strait giving access to another bay in the middle of which lay the St. Joseph mission.

After an invocation to my guardian angel and a careful scrutiny of the bay, I struck out in what looked the most promising direction. At the end of half an hour, I entered the strait and shortly afterwards caught sight of the mission church with its slender steeple. Pointing my canoe straight at the steeple, I rowed till my oars touched bottom and only a few yards separated me from land. There a cheery welcome awaited the "Little Big Praying Man."

Accompanied by Brother Larue from the St. Joseph mission I next made my way to St. Anne's mission on the Hay River. We were camped on the shore of Great Slave Lake when a storm blew up, and the ice, driven by the storm, began to drift toward the point where we were encamped. We had only enough time to withdraw into the forest, dragging our baggage and canoe along with us.

No one who has not seen it can imagine the force behind a block of ice, three or four feet thick and two hundred miles long, driven by a raging wind. The ice is still too solid to break into fragments. It comes on in a single block and with frightening rapidity. There seems to be nothing to stop it. As it approaches shore, rocks of every size, and all the driftwood blown up by the winds of summer, are violently caught up, clash madly together, and perform all kinds of antics. Eventually they are hurled right up into the forest.

For three days we stayed where we were without hope of being released by any kindly wind from the south. Meanwhile we had built ourselves a little sled, thinking it better to make some attempt to push on. We started off, hauling our sled which was loaded with the canoe, our provisions and baggage. After camping twice we arrived with much difficulty at a place named

"The Peninsula." Here a sudden storm from the southeast broke loose the ice in front of us and thrust it, for the most part without disintegrating it, in a northwesterly direction. However, an enormous block was left adhering to the shore all along the bay from The Peninsula to the headland called "Sulphur Point." We thus had a passage opened for us which because of the direction of the wind steadily fanned out wider.

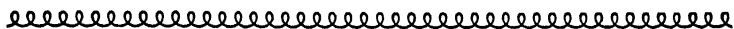
We decided to launch our canoe, and had already covered half the distance to Sulphur Point when the wind veered and began to blow with equal violence from the northwest. For a moment the huge ice block was immobilized, but very soon it was moving again in our direction, and we were in danger of being crushed between it and the ice still adhering to the shore. Our only hope was to use our sail and turn back as quickly as possible. When we reached The Peninsula, we just had time to land our canoe before the ice from the lake crashed into that which was left in the bay along the shore.

The crash forced us to make the round of the bay, the depth of which frightened us somewhat, but what else was to be done? To venture upon the ice any distance from land was to run the risk of being forced out into the lake by a gust of wind and who could tell where we might have ended? So we followed the shore till we came upon a fairly wide sheet of water where we launched our canoe, only to have to haul it on to the ice a few hundred yards further on. It was not till the eighteenth day that we reached St. Anne's mission.

My visits to the other missions were uneventful. But at all of them the sincerity of the missionaries' welcome to me, their loyal cooperation, their devotion and spirit of self-sacrifice, completely won my heart.

It was to be the same in the Yukon, the land of gold.

## 14: *In the Gold Country*



ON THE DAY I was consecrated, Father Gendreau, hitherto Bishop Grouard's vicar-general at Dawson, entreated me to find someone to replace him. The state of his eyes made it impossible for him to remain longer in so cold a climate. I would have liked to go to the Yukon at once to consider the best means of dealing with this situation, but it had been impossible to postpone till winter my visit to the missions of the Mackenzie district. Besides, my health was not good enough to face the hazards of a dogsled journey of several months.

Fortunately Bishop Dontenwill of New Westminster was good enough to offer to me his own vicar-general, Father Emile Bunoz, one of our Oblates, to whom I wrote immediately to say how much I needed him. "In reply of your letter," he wrote back, "I can only say: *Fiat voluntas tua!* I cannot be blind to the difficulties I shall meet with at Dawson. . . . I also regret having to leave the Columbia vicariate, to which I am so much attached. But it is God's will and I am ready to make the sacrifice."

The good Father's acceptance was a great relief to me. In the same letter he announced that he would be at Dawson that July. He was as good as his word, and took charge of the parish and district. At Dawson he had with him Fathers Lefebvre and Schultze, who visited the mining camps in the neighborhood every Sunday. Father Aloysius Levert served the Bonanza and Eldorado camps; Father Godefroy Eichelsbacher visited those of Last Chance and Gold Bottom; while the Abbé Gobeil, a secular priest, exercised his ministry at White Horse.

The Yukon territory forms the extremity of the Canadian



Northwest. It has an area of 207,676 square miles, or something like five or six percent of the whole Dominion. Its boundaries are the Arctic Ocean on the north, the Mackenzie district to the east, British Columbia and the southern part of Alaska in the south, and to the west, the main body of Alaska itself.

The Yukon River, which crosses this territory, is formed by a number of tributaries fed by the many lakes and glaciers scattered over a wide area among the mountains of Mackenzie, British Columbia and the borders of Alaska. From White Horse onward, a two-hundred-foot boat, with a load of seven hundred tons, can navigate the Yukon as far as the Bering Strait on the Arctic Sea.

The climate of the Yukon is one of extremes. From May to October it is pleasant enough, but the winters are long and cold; on the other hand, the absence of high winds and the dryness of the atmosphere both help to make them endurable.

Before the white man's arrival the natives lived entirely by hunting and fishing, the caribou providing the bulk of their food. In summer, wild berries relieved to some extent the monotony of the menu. The Yukon has a remarkable variety and quantity of flowers predominantly blue, pink and yellow. The forget-me-not, which is by no means a rare flower, here has a distinctive shade of blue, much deeper than in the south.

There are gardens of every size, adapted to the needs of the inhabitants. Potatoes, carrots, beets and cabbage are all grown successfully. Strawberries, raspberries and currants are also to be found. In the valleys there are fields suitable for big-scale farming. Corn, barley and other cereals have been successfully cultivated.

In 1894 the Ottawa government dispatched a contingent of Mounted Police, under Superintendent Constantine, to keep order in the Yukon. The Laurier cabinet lost no time in sending reinforcements and an official commissioner. Thanks to the resourcefulness and devotion of this body of police there was little crime in this region, despite its sudden invasion by thirty thousand fortune-hunting strangers, of every nationality and every mentality.

In 1898, an Act of Parliament (the Yukon Act) established the

Yukon as a separate territory. Later an amendment to the legislation (chap. 215, *Revised Statutes of Canada*, 1927) established a local government, with a commissioner as executive head who was later to take the title of controller, and a legislative council of three members elected for a term of three years. The controller governed the Territory in accordance with instructions received from the governor-general in council, or the Ministry of Mines and Resources.

In the summer of 1902 mail was delivered about once a week. In the winter there was one post a month, except for the period from the beginning of October till January 10, 1903, when there was none at all. Needless to say, aviation has since improved the postal service, both in speed and frequency.

The founding of Dawson in the Yukon has an interesting history. On the discovery of the rich gold deposits on the Klondike River, the ground to the north of its mouth was chosen as the supply center for the whole district. Quays were built and houses went up. The first of these were constructed hastily on the surface of the soil, but as buildings became larger, and required basements for the installation of central heating, a serious problem arose. Dawson was actually built on a vast glacier and to install furnaces in the ice itself, which was no more than two or three feet below the surface under an alluvial bed covered with turf never penetrated by the warmth of the sun, required exceptional ingenuity to reduce to a minimum the melting of the ice. Sawdust was used, and any other insulating material that was available, but with the furnaces red-hot all through the winter, the desired result could not be completely realized. When, with the return of summer, it thawed out-of-doors, the houses began to lose balance on their foundations, and leaned somewhat alarmingly to one side or to the other. However, a jack or lever restored them to an upright position and this operation was repeated whenever necessary.

The evangelizing of the country goes back to 1862 when the first Catholic priest to reach the Yukon, Father Séguin, O.M.I.,

arrived. Setting out on Holy Saturday from Good Hope, he made a halt with the Loucheux Indians of Fort McPherson and arrived on June 11 at Lapierre House, the first trading post beyond the Rockies. He had made the journey in the company of a Protestant minister, a Mr. Kirby. At Lapierre House he laid the foundations of a mission which he dedicated to St. Barnabas.

On August 2 Father Séguin returned to Good Hope; but on September 3, on order from Bishop Grandin, he set out again, this time for Fort Yukon. He reached there on September 23. "It took us four days," he wrote, "to cross the mountains, walking the whole day in water, ice and snow up to our knees. For two of these days we have had a frightful blizzard . . ."

On September 30 he began a diary, for the information of Bishop Taché, dating it from the Mission of St. John the Evangelist which he had just founded. He recounts how, whereas the Protestant minister lodged with the factors and ate at their table, he found himself relegated to the company of the hired Indians, having to eat with them and chop wood. When the men went hunting, he had to remain with the women and children, exposed to their jeers and indignities. In short, he was treated "cossack-fashion" and spent there, in Russian territory,<sup>1</sup> a most dreary winter. It being quite impossible in such circumstances to exercise his ministry, he set out on June 3 for Fort Yukon. On July 14 he arrived at Good Hope on the barge of Mr. Macfarlane, a friendly agent of the Hudson's Bay Company.

In 1870, Father Petitot made another vain attempt at evangelizing the district. Then, in 1872, as the result of an urgent request to Bishop Faraud by a French Canadian named Moise Mercier, an agent of the Alaska Commercial Company, Bishop Isidore Clut went to the Yukon, accompanied by Father Lecorre, then a secular priest.

They had an arduous journey over the portage across the Rocky Mountains. When at length the elk-skin canoe they had been carrying was launched on the Porcupine River the north wind blew incessantly and in a few days the canoe sank amid the

<sup>1</sup> Alaska was not purchased by the United States till 1867.

splintering ice. A good Squinter family took pity on the two missionaries and offered them provisions, a sled and a dog. For seven days Bishop Clut, axe in hand, hacked out a passage for the sled. Father Lecorre, who was seriously ill, followed as best he could. On October 11 they reached the home of Moise Mercier, who as a good Catholic was proud to have priests in his house and invited them to spend the winter with him.

The expedition was a complete failure, as far as concerned their ministry among the now fanatically hostile Indians. Therefore, in the spring of 1873, the two missionaries decided to do some exploring with a view to founding some missions in the near future. They encountered Indians who had once seen Russian priests and showed themselves very friendly, and with them, descended the Yukon as far as Fort St. Michael on the Pacific Ocean. There Bishop Clut left Father Lecorre to look after the Indians and on July 7 began his return trip to Fort Yukon and thence back across the Rockies.

On arriving at Providence mission, he received by courier, on March 11, 1874, two letters which made him instantly think of Father Lecorre. The first, from Bishop Faraud, dated from Lyons, October 13, 1873, mentioned that doubts had arisen about his jurisdiction in Alaska and told him that a ruling had been requested from Rome. An early reply had been asked for, but as none had arrived it would be better to abandon Alaska till further information was available. The second letter, from New Westminster, dated November 12, 1873, was from Bishop d'Herbomez, O.M.I. It gave the contents of a document of 1868, signed by Cardinal Barnaboe, Prefect of Propaganda, who with the approbation of Pope Pius IX assigned Alaska definitively to Bishop Demers of Vancouver. The two letters suggested that the evangelizing of Alaska was to be entrusted to the Jesuit Fathers, which later it was.

Bishop Clut was censured for undertaking this expedition. In a letter of June 10, 1873, Bishop Faraud himself expressed his concern about this, apparently forgetting that he himself had exceeded his authority in ordering the journey to Fort Yukon,

which was in Alaska. Similarly at a later time, Bishop Seghers, who thought that "the Oblates were meddling in things that didn't concern them," exceeded his authority when he left Fathers Tossi and Robaut to found a mission at the confluence of the rivers Stewart and Yukon. This post, being in Canadian Territory, was actually under the jurisdiction of Bishop Faraud.

There is no suggestion that the two bishops were not actuated by the best intentions, but in those early days communications were extremely complicated and infrequent. Moreover, the geography of the country was still very vague, owing to the ambiguous terms of the treaty of 1825 between Russia and Great Britain. Nor had there been any surveying to mark on the actual ground the location of longitude 141° west, which was the boundary between Yukon and Alaska.

Father Judge, S.J., an Alaskan missionary, was the first to visit the new mining camps of the Yukon and it was not long before he had built a little church with logs from the local woods, brought in by the miners. Soon afterwards the Sisters of St. Anne, thanks to the generosity of the local population, built a hospital. Bishop Grouard, who was responsible for the district, handed over all authority to Father Judge, whose kindness and devotion to duty were well known. On April 11, 1888, on the orders of Bishop Grouard, Father Camille Lefebvre, O.M.I. left his Loucheux and Eskimos in Mackenzie and set out for Dawson. After several long delays en route, he reached his destination on June 11, at 11:30 in the evening, only to learn from Father Judge that the church had burned down the week before. Next morning, however, both priests said Mass at the portable altar Father Lefebvre had brought with him.

Soon Father Gendreau, an Oblate father, generously lent by Archbishop Langevin of St. Boniface, came and took charge of the district, and after him, Father Desmarais, who brought Brother Augustin Dumas, a first-rate carpenter, to help in the work of building. In 1900 Bishop Grouard himself crossed the Rocky Mountains in order to visit the Yukon district. It was

after this visit that he requested the Holy See to divide his vicariate.

The first time I heard the Yukon mentioned was in 1898, at Fort Chipewyan, on my arrival from Fond du Lac. The lakes and rivers at that time were cluttered with boats of every shape and size, carrying prospectors and miners of every age and nationality, and with little or no resources. In their haste to arrive first at the gold field recently discovered in the Yukon, the reputed wealth of which had given rise all over the world to a veritable epidemic of gold fever, these poor fellows believed the Mackenzie route the only way to reach their destination.

One day we had a visit from a Frenchman, a lawyer or notary from the suburbs of Paris. He was walking along the shore, a saw in one hand and a trestle in the other, seeking, among the driftwood, some dry fuel for his camp kettle. Surprised to hear us speaking French, he introduced himself, presented his credentials, and imparted to us his hopes of an easy fortune. He was a simple honest fellow, and immediately felt at home with us.

One of us asked him where he had bought his fine trestle.

"At Montreal," he told us. "Would you believe it, they told us it was the last town where I could get supplies for my journey." He laughed heartily at the way he had been taken in.

How many others had been cheated in just the same way! The nearer they got to Edmonton, and even at Edmonton itself, the more their inexperience was abused. General outfitters advised them to provide themselves with everything they represented as absolutely essential: guns, arms of all sorts, knives of every size for dismembering game and defending themselves against savages, sleds and snowshoes for winter, sunglasses, sandglasses, mosquito oil and heaven knows what.

Another typical case was that of two gallant lads, also from overseas, who at Athabasca Landing had bought a boat sufficiently light to be easily transported across the Rockies and over the long portage from the estuary of the Mackenzie to the Bell River.

"That boat," someone told them, "isn't big or strong enough for the lakes." Whereupon these lads bought a second boat to transport the first and all their supplies as well.

God alone knows how many of these gold-hungry wretches perished on the way, of exhaustion or starvation, when their food supplies dwindled away all too soon. Little did I imagine then that one day the Holy See would send me to those regions as bishop.

However, there was now no further doubt on the subject. By the will of the Holy See the Yukon had been entrusted to the zeal of the Oblate missionaries, under the jurisdiction of the vicar apostolic of Mackenzie. And since by the same will of the Holy See, and in spite of my inexperience, I had become vicar apostolic of Mackenzie, it was my duty to acquaint myself with this new field for my apostolic labors, the Yukon, which included the Klondike, famous for its deposits of gold; in 1900 alone these had produced nearly \$22,500,000.

At Edmonton before setting out I saw Bishop Grouard and complained of the complications my task involved, of the lack of vocations, lack of resources and above all my own lack of experience. He heard me out, puffing at his pipe.

"My dear Monseigneur," he said when I had finished, "it's wrong of you to go on like this. Isn't it for God we are working? We must do our best with the means at our disposal."

A comfortable conveyance brought me to Vancouver in a day and a half, a fascinating journey across the Rocky Mountains. No less pleasant was the crossing from Vancouver to Skagway from which a train carried me to White Horse and a boat to Dawson.

I made a tour of the mining centers, where the missionaries had erected chapels of wood or beaverboard. Thanks to a princely gift of \$25,000 from that good Catholic, Alexander Macdonald, known as "King of the Klondike," St. Mary's church had been built at Dawson. St. Anne's hospital was a very satisfying achievement; our nuns were doing excellent work there, and the parish school under Sister Mary Edith was very successful.

The mining camps were not yet very numerous. The following were scattered along the Klondike River and its tributaries: Bonanza, Eldorado, Hunker, Last Chance, High Dominion, Low Dominion and Gold Bottom. I spent a Sunday at each, and two or three days more, doing my best to see everyone in the area. They seemed very happy to welcome their bishop.

Character and manners were often crude, but hearts were in the right place. Many of the miners had left their native lands in quest of adventure, and having rarely met a priest thereafter, had abandoned the practice of their religion. Now that they had encountered one again, and he was living among them, their faith was reawakened.

On December 14, I administered the sacrament of Confirmation at Dawson, then on the day after Christmas I took my place on the sled that carried the first mails to the railroad terminus at White Horse. Urged on by the drivers, the four horses moved swiftly. But there was no shelter for the passengers and despite a good buffalo rug about my legs and a cloak, two big mittens and a cap all of fur, my poor face and nose, well to the forefront as usual, had to endure a temperature of from thirty to forty degrees below zero. And this cold seemed all the more biting from the speed of the horses in the freezing wind. In the course of the journey I made it a rule after dinner to go on ahead and wait for the sled to catch up to me. In the evening I walked for an hour before supper. This exercise served to stretch the legs and give an edge to my appetite.

One day I came upon an old Canadian hauling a little sled which bore his bedding, axe, pick and a few provisions. A native of Quebec, he had been engaged in prospecting and mining for forty years and had been to California and Alaska. Several times he had struck gold and become rich. Now his only wealth was what he carried on his sled. But he had heard of a good place and . . . now he was off to it. This time he had to think of his old age.

"How old are you?" I asked him.



"Seventy, Father," he replied.

"You must hurry up, then, my friend, if you want to make a little money for your old age!"

They are all alike, these old miners, optimists to the end. Milton Martin, who welcomed me on behalf of the French population in Dawson, wrote to me recently after returning there:

"Yes, they are always the same, these Klondike pioneers. I have met some old friends. A number of them have had their affluent days and today they are living in poverty . . . Dawson will recover, they say. Meanwhile they go on paying taxes on old tumble-down houses thinking 'the good days will come back.'"

"If I had dug two feet deeper," one of them told him, "I would have struck bedrock and — gold!"

All he regretted was that his health would not allow him to go on working.

## 15: *A Trip to Rome*

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THE BOAT deposited me at Seattle, Washington, where at half past five in the morning I rang the bell at the hospital conducted by the Sisters of Providence. The nun who opened the door was astonished to be confronted by a stranger with a long beard, wearing a fur coat and cap — when the roses were still in bloom in the hospital garden.

When I expressed a wish to say Mass she seemed rather frightened.

"Wait a moment," she said, "I will go and find my superior."

With that she left me at the door.

When the superior arrived I introduced myself as an Oblate missionary from Dawson on my way to eastern Canada. I said I would like to say Mass immediately, adding that I wanted to catch the eight o'clock train for Vancouver.

"Certainly, Father, the Oblates are quite at home here."

I went into the sacristy, where a French priest presented himself and asked my name.

"Breynat," was all I told him.

On the chaplain's appearing, the French priest introduced me and the chaplain insisted that I should say the community Mass.

"I have a car," he said. "I'll see you don't miss your train."

On entering the sanctuary I put on my pastoral ring. The priest, in an ordinary clerical suit, came and knelt at a prie-dieu on the Gospel side. But when, after the *Kyrie*, he heard me say *Pax vobis* instead of the *Dominus vobiscum* said by priests, he started up as though he had been shot, went to don a soutane and surplice, and returned to serve me in the sanctuary. The

Sisters, devout and modest souls, duly remarked this fact and at the Communion they all kissed my ring.

After the Mass I had scarcely left the sanctuary to return to the sacristy when my companion exclaimed:

"Why on earth didn't you tell me you were a bishop?"

"Why didn't you ask?" I retorted.

Thereupon the chaplain made his excuses, and the superior hers, all blushing with confusion.

The incident won me a good breakfast, the price of my ticket to Vancouver and an armchair in a Pullman.

In his letter telling me of my nomination as vicar apostolic of Mackenzie, Bishop Langevin had said: "There is also the question of the Yukon, whether to make it an ordinary apostolic prefecture . . ."

"Why wasn't this done," I replied, "when the Mackenzie vicariate was created?"

The fact was I did not feel justified in taking the responsibility of giving my consent without knowing what the situation was in the district.

"If it is a matter of urgency," I added, "let this new division be made at once without my consent and I shall be perfectly happy. Otherwise it had better wait till I have visited the Yukon and can speak with knowledge of the facts."

This visit I had now made. I had studied the question thoroughly on the spot, exploring the ground with people of experience who were both wise and unprejudiced. I was now convinced that it had been a mistake to join this district to the Mackenzie, separated as it was by the Rocky Mountains. Actually the journey from one district to the other involved crossing the Athabasca district and three dioceses, plus eight hundred miles by boat on the Pacific. It is true there was an alternative route, over the McPherson portage by the Rat River. Bishop Grouard had taken this once, but I doubt very much whether he would have done it again.

As soon as I had learned of the project of the Athabasca-Mac-

kenzie division and the joining of the two districts of Mackenzie and Yukon I had ventured to point out to Bishop Grouard the awkwardness of the arrangement.

"Our Mackenzie missions are very poor," he replied. "The Klondike mines will provide us with plenty of funds."

He had visited the Yukon in its bumper year, 1900, when the gold harvest had exceeded twenty million dollars: enough to arouse general enthusiasm. Unfortunately for the gold seekers, no auriferous quartz had yet been discovered in the Yukon; if it had been, it would have more or less stabilized the mining industry and assured the future prospects of the district. In spite of feverish prospecting, all that was found were ordinary deposits of gold dust and nuggets in the bed of a few rivers. These were soon exhausted, and after that . . . ?

The 1902 returns showed a falling off even more marked than that of the previous year. There were whispers, it is true, that a fresh deposit had recently been discovered, and those who were discouraged about the Klondike were already turning their eyes in this direction. But the discovery had been made six hundred miles further on in the Alaska territory, at a place called Pano-rama.

The ecclesiastical revenues suffered rather badly from this falling off in the gold harvest. Father Bunoz, the parish priest at Dawson, showed me his balance at the bank. It was just enough to cover the cost of building one or two small chapels for the benefit of the poor miners. I received enough to cover my traveling expenses and the expense of a journey to Rome. But that was all.

So the Mackenzie missions could not rely too much on help from the Klondike, and the future of the Yukon was still too uncertain to justify its being made a vicariate, or even a simple apostolic prefecture. In the train that carried me to eastern Canada I reflected at leisure on the pros and cons of this question and on arriving at St. Boniface I reported fully to Bishop Langevin. We agreed to postpone the carrying out of the project till later.

At Ottawa I stopped to see Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Prime Minister of Canada, and called his attention to the fact that the monthly contribution of a dollar each to our forty children at Providence was far from enough to cover the cost of their feeding, clothing and lodging. Bishop Grouard had told me of the friendly reception he had received from Sir Wilfrid and the encouraging promises he had brought away. Like Bishop Grouard I was very well received. The Prime Minister listened to what I had to say with much interest and apparent sympathy. I too carried away . . . encouraging promises!

It was my first experience with politicians. I had to wait till January 30, 1907, before I could announce to our Sisters at Providence the success of my mission. Then the Department of Indian Affairs made me a grant of \$72 a year per child, but only for twenty-five children, whereas at that time we had nearly fifty. Moreover, it was to be regarded as a *favor* and it was carefully pointed out to me that "the Mackenzie, being a missionary field, is the Church's responsibility."

I made another stop at Montreal. Then at New York I caught the liner *Vaterland* and arrived in Belgium on February 11, 1903.

Our principal house in Paris was upside down. The anti-clerical movement was at its height. On March 24 our priests were expelled from the Shrine of the Sacré-Coeur on Montmartre, of which they were the official guardians; the turn of our Fathers at the motherhouse came on June 1.

I paid a visit to my native department of the Drôme and there saw my brother, now curé of Serves and the only other survivor of the family. I also prayed at the grave of my parents at Saint-Vallier.

Finally I reached Rome. Leo XIII, then ninety years of age, had virtually ceased giving audiences. I had to be insistent with the majordomo, telling him that my savages would never understand how I could set out from the Arctic Ocean to see the Pope and not have audience with the "Great Praying Chief." A few moments were all I required and I promised not to tire the Holy

Father. My words were effective and I was privileged to kneel at the feet of Leo XIII, while several cardinals were waiting to come in, apparently for some important deliberation.

Like all who had this privilege of meeting Leo XIII, I was struck by the beauty of his face which had an ascetic and almost transparent quality. He showered me with blessings for my missionaries, their flocks and my own humble person. He was to die soon after, on July 20, 1903.

I had an interview with Cardinal Simeoni, Prefect of Propaganda, who gave me all the directives I needed, understanding readily enough that in countries so remote and difficult of access, missionaries and vicar apostolic alike must be entrusted with the most extensive powers. I remember submitting to him three cases of conscience in the matter of canon law. Each time he threw up his hands, explaining: "*Eh! Eh! Ad impossibile, nemo tenetur!*" (No one is bound to do the impossible.)

"Thank you, Your Eminence," I said, "I know the principle and shall apply it when the occasion arises!"

I returned from France to Canada on the *Lorraine*, bringing with me two young recruits, Fathers Louis Duport and Nicholas Laperrière. The former was from the Ardèche, the latter from Savoy, each of them bearing the distinguishing qualities of his native countryside.

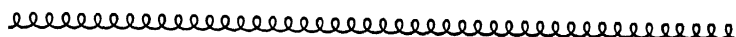
On board there were some sixty religious, male and female: Dominicans, Franciscans and others expelled from France by the anticlerical laws. Also aboard were the members of a commission which the French government was sending to the Olympic Games at Los Angeles or New Orleans. This commission was presided over by a M. Michel who, if I remember rightly, had distinguished himself in the liquidation of the Carthusians' property. Naturally the presence of sixty religious was visibly embarrassing to the representatives of the government that was sending us into exile. However, we had no complaint to make of them; their attitude throughout the voyage was perfectly correct.

When we were a day out from New York there was the cus-

tomary banquet, with champagne. There was also to have been a great ball and the ladies had donned appropriate costumes. However, the religious had arranged among themselves to leave the salon before the champagne made its appearance. They all went up to the gallery overlooking the salon and assembled there about a piano which was at the passengers' disposal. Then, at the top of their voices, they sang the famous hymn composed by Gounod for the departure of missionaries. A deep silence fell among the guests, and there was no ball that evening. Later a member of the commission came and knocked at my cabin door. Without saying a word — though he was visibly moved — he handed me a thousand-franc note. . . .

Montreal, St. Boniface, Edmonton — the last stages of the journey. I had been traveling for a year, covering 20,682 miles. To this figure should be added the distance covered during the visit to the mining camps in the Klondike and the side-trips during my European stay. Looking backward over this first year of my episcopate I had, I felt, lived up to my motto: *Peregrinari pro Christo* — To travel for Christ!

16: *The Story of Our First Foundation*



IN SPITE of their twenty-four-hour days, our summers in the North, by which I mean the periods when navigation is possible, are short. The ice on the northernmost rivers never breaks till the middle or end of May, and then clutters the lakes till the early days of July. By the end of September or October navigation becomes dangerous because of the north winds which blow almost incessantly. The water in the lakes is stirred to the depths, cools quickly and then freezes solid, making it impossible to travel by boat.

The Athabasca River, further south, swollen by the melting snow from the mountains, sloughs off its casing of ice about the end of April. Allowing for the fact that one can always count on some delay in the portages, navigation is ordinarily safe enough by the beginning of May to risk starting northward. So by May 9, 1903, boats and crews were in readiness and we set out without delay.

Our party was quite large. Besides the two young priests who had come with me from France there were six Grey Nuns among whom were Sister St. Angela who had just been appointed superior of the Holy Angels convent at Fort Chipewyan, and Sister Boisvert, superior of the new school at Fort Resolution. In their care were four other Sisters just out of the novitiate.

On our arrival opposite Fort Resolution, on June 16, we were startled at seeing from the boat a bare timber structure, without any roof to it, where we had expected a convent all ready to receive the foundresses of the school! The surprise of those ashore on seeing the Sisters was just as great.

Poor Father Dupire, in residence there, was completely abashed and did not even wait for the customary salutations. "We had no idea they were coming," he moaned, rubbing his ears and his beard alternately and turning this way and that as if to find someone to blame for the blunder or misunderstanding. When I had left him, the previous summer, I had told him that if I could collect the religious for the following spring I would write to him to hurry with the building. Immediately after my reaching an understanding with Mother Hamel in Montreal, I had in fact written to him to hold himself in readiness.

"But I never got your letter," he complained.

Well, the letter did arrive — but a month after we did!

"We were obliged," so Sister MacQuillan relates, "to find a refuge with the Fathers in the loft of their log cabin. This loft, six feet high in the middle and four at the sides, was infested with mice. It was not till mid-July, on the return of the *Saint-Alphonse* from Fort Liard with a cargo of timber for the roof, that the Brothers and their hired workmen could resume work on our future house. Roof, floor, doors and windows were barely complete when we had to think of moving in. We had already accepted six children whose parents had gone back to the woods for the winter.

"The boys occupied the first floor, which was connected to the second by a ladder. On the second were the little girls. It was a spacious site; twenty-four by thirty feet. With blankets for walls we made ourselves a cloister, and thus had a dormitory and a community room for the Sisters.

"The place was a regular workshop. The Brothers' bench and tools were kept in the girls' room. The heaps of shavings provided plenty of material for making excellent mattresses. We had only to spread out our blankets, which we had to fold up again in the morning to make room for the girls to play . . .

"By the end of August we had twenty-five children, thirteen girls and twelve boys. There was no room in the house for a kitchen. So a small shed was built for this purpose, four feet away from the school. Part of this, curtained off with a piece of printed

cloth, served as a refectory for the reverend Fathers and Brothers.

"Classes began in September. It was quite an event for our twenty-five little bronze faces who had never before taken part in such a ceremony. At first, it was not easy to keep them in order, but very soon they all began to take an interest in their work.

"During the day the boys' room served for classes and games. In the evening they all spread their blankets on the floor for a well-earned rest. Periodically a northwest wind and heavy rain removed the mud caulking from the various walls of the house and left the whole school open to the four winds. In the morning we Sisters had to clear out all this mud, but the children were happy because they could now look through the cracks and feel much more at home."

In 1905 the school had increased to thirty-five children and was so successful that I began to think of putting up a new building. It was important to choose a site where the land was suitable not only for a school and special courses of instruction, but also for the establishment of a cattle farm which would provide butter, milk and meat.

With the assistance of Father Mansoz, then superior of the mission, I explored the far end of the bay. Here we discovered a site that was rather marshy, but easy enough to drain, near which there were two little huts, one of which could shelter a school, the other serve as a residence for the Fathers. Next day ten men began the work of clearance. The formidable task occupied the entire winter and summer of 1908-1909.

"Our convent is comfortable," wrote Sister St. Albina a little later. "The rooms are large and well lit. We have a pretty and devotional little chapel. The heating system works so marvelously, that we quite forget the polar cold and the flies and mosquitoes, and feeling the grateful warmth, wake up once more and think it is summer. They buzz most vigorously, which is pleasant enough in winter, but what about next summer? I am sure we shall have to pay for such sensual satisfactions."

Poor Sisters! The sensual satisfactions of the Mackenzie . . .

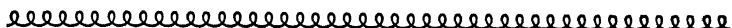
at that time and in such circumstances! But let Sister MacQuillan have the last word:

"The spring of 1910 found us spending our spare time digging up stumps and clearing the ground to make a playing field for the boys and girls . . . "

Meanwhile Sister Honorine was at work as late as ten each evening preparing the ground for a small garden. A few years later two new wings were added, which enabled us to provide for a hundred and twenty children. The Canadian government made us no grant for the actual building of the school, but it did send us beds and good mattresses. I do not think Sister MacQuillan regretted the shavings, on which she and her girls had slept in the original house.

Later, the Department of Indian Affairs raised the original allowance of \$72 to \$125 a child, or about twenty-one cents a day for each for food and clothing.

17: *A Long Voyage by Canoe*



IN RELATING the history of the boarding school at Fort Resolution I have rather run ahead of my chronology. I must now go back to August 5, 1903, when I set out by canoe with Brother Marc Leborgne for our missions at Fort Liard and at Fort Nelson. To go downstream for the 156 miles of the Mackenzie which separate Providence from Fort Simpson is one of the pleasantest trips imaginable when there is no necessity to row against the frequent headwinds from the north. But to go two hundred miles against the stream up the Liard River to the fort of that name is neither easy nor pleasant.

At Fort Simpson Fathers Vacher and Le Guen joined us. From there we had to take turns walking along the bank and towing the canoe. When the bank was picturesque there was a relative charm about it; but there were rapids through which it was difficult to tow our canoe, and higher up we came to the flat, alluvial land where it was often necessary to clear a way with an axe through dense grasses and full-grown trees.

Because of the rise in the level of the water, following the spring thaw, masses of debris had been piled upon the shore obliterating all traces of the path we had been following. It was often a matter of passing the towrope over whole trees which grew some distance out in the river where the banks had been worn away by the stream. Since most of these trees had been there for years the ice had removed their branches, but some still retained their limbs and foliage. Imagine then the job it was to flick the rope from branch to branch without snarling it. Only one who has made the journey could have any conception of the difficulties to

be overcome. "No Christian has ever come this way before," was the comment of our Brother Rio, when he ascended this river for the first time.

The Nelson River, though smaller than the Liard, was even more dangerous. Here successive landslides had left many trees right in the middle of the stream. With the passing of the years and the periodic breaking up of the ice, they had lost their tops and a good part of their trunks. What remained was under water, deeply rooted, and was a menace to every craft that happened to foul it.

Going upstream, the danger was certainly less, but progress was slow and difficult. When night fell, woe to the inexperienced traveler who did not know enough to choose sufficiently high ground for his camp, and lodge his canoe, baggage and provisions in a secure spot. Heavy rainstorms in the nearby Rockies often caused the water to rise four or five feet in a single night.

When we reached St. Raphael we found the mission flourishing. The ground was excellent and produced wheat and oats. The same situation prevailed at St. Paul, an almost inaccessible post which would one day have an enormous airfield and become an important traffic center on the highway joining Edmonton to White Horse and Fairbanks in Alaska.

We pressed on to Providence mission where we rested two days before re-embarking in our canoe to visit our Brothers who were fishing in Lake Beaver. They had caught 8,000 fish averaging two pounds each. A Grey Sister and one of the older girls, besides cooking for the fishermen, also lent a hand in spitting the fish.

When the cargo was all aboard and we were about to set out, a high wind rose and prevented our departure. Next day it began to snow. It was not until October 3 that we arrived safely at Lake Beaver. Two other scows were to bring to us from Grosse Ile, another fishing bed, the rest of our supplies for the winter and we awaited them with impatience. Already the ground was covered with two inches of snow, and our fishermen were without shelter on the river. At last, on October 19, Brother Le Mouel arrived.

But he had to abandon his boat which had become wedged in the ice and crushed with 7,000 fish aboard.

A second scow, with Brother Olivier Carour in charge, and a Grey Nun, Sister Clare, and one of her girls aboard, was expected the same evening, but did not appear. On the 21st we learned what had happened. While we were at our midday meal Father Gouy arrived and told us, with tears in his eyes, that Brother Olivier, seeing that it was impossible to steer the boat through the floating ice, had been forced to let it drift. It had snowed all night and on reaching Beaver Lake the boat was caught in the ice which formed a solid block about it.

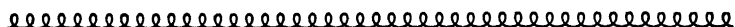
"We were not far from land," Father Gouy added. "At daybreak, with oars strapped to my arms, I slid across the ice which was still too thin to carry a man walking upright. Near the shore I was in water up to my knees. Finally I headed here."

Our thoughts went at once to the three left in the boat, the Brother, the Sister and her girl companion, all exposed to the cold, the wind and snow, and without a fire. There was no time to lose. Before daybreak eight dogsleds, loaded with provisions and warm clothes, were on their way. The two sleds with the best dogs returned at once with poor Sister Clare and her companion and all of us uttered a heartfelt *Deo gratias* for their rescue.

However, the other six sled teams remained where they were to help salvage the fish. The first thing they did was build a fencing to protect the fish from being devoured by wolves. Meanwhile the cold had hardened the ice sufficiently to allow the unloading of the boat. This done, the teams returned to the mission, each carrying two or three hundred fish.

Two days later, the temperature rose, thanks to a wind from the southwest—a kind of chinook which broke the ice. The boat we thought lost for good was carried off amid the floating ice, but it seemed guided by Providence and just as it was opposite the mission, the wind drove it into a backwater. The Brothers drew it out and secured it in a safe spot. Brother Le Mouel's boat, which had also been carried away when the ice broke, was discovered the following spring in a bay some seventy-five miles from the mission.

18: *I Take to a Steamer*



THE General Chapter of the Oblates, held at Liège in 1904, took me back to Europe. On this trip I had the great joy of being received by Pope Pius X in Rome where they were celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. On December 12, Pius X addressed the bishops from all over the world who had come to Rome for the occasion, recommending them to watch carefully over their seminaries and aspirants to the priesthood and to be on their guard against the rising threats to authority and doctrine.

The previous year at Toronto I had ordered the engines and material for building a new steamer. During my stay in Europe I learned that the barge that was conveying them had struck a rock and suffered considerable damage. Immediately on my return I hurried to the spot, where I found the boiler and material all intact. Before the steamer was completed at Fort Smith, however, I had to return to Rome for the General Chapter of 1906, where we elected Father Auguste Lavillardière as the new Superior General of the Oblate.

On June 15, 1906, our new steamer the *Sainte-Marie* was ready. We made a successful trip from Fort Smith to the Red River. At Fort Simpson we learned that our young missionary, Father Moisan, had had both his feet frostbitten the previous winter. This is his account of the affair:

"I was returning alone after a journey of about thirty miles. When crossing a lake quite near the mission, I was careless enough to walk in some water concealed by the snow. On reach-

ing home I found that my feet were clamped in two vises of ice and some of the toes were frostbitten.

"For more than a month I could not say Mass. I was in considerable pain, and night after night, as I looked up at the stars and the aurora borealis, I wondered: 'How many toes will have to come off?'

"When the time was ripe, the Father Superior (Father Gouy), at my request and in spite of his repugnance, sharpened his pen-knife, cautiously took my right foot in his hand, and cut off two toes: the big and the little one.

"Now I am getting on well. I can walk, and even run. Next winter, with the three toes left, I hope to be able to get about on snowshoes." He was able to do as he had hoped.

I had promised my Caribou Eaters at Fond du Lac to come and spend Christmas with them. After five days by horse sleigh and ten by dogsled, I arrived at the Nativity mission on December 21. Our dogs made light of the two hundred miles to my old mission, which I reached after three nights out-of-doors in the snow.

My good Caribou Eaters were there, almost in full strength, radiant with health in their new caribou-skin clothes, and delighted to see again their "new Little Praying Man," who was now their "Big Praying Man." I can see them still, smiling, and shaking my hand cordially, after kneeling in the snow to receive my blessing. Fathers Biehler and Laffont could not express their pleasure at my visit. Brother Courteille had some tongues ready for us and a fine piece of caribou. My companions and I did justice to them.

Afterward I heard confessions. I had a large clientele, so eager were these poor folk to tell their troubles, great and small, to their old missionary, to whom they knew they were still very dear. All assisted devoutly at the three Masses I celebrated from midnight onwards. During the first they gave a spirited rendering of the Common, and during the two low Masses they sang hymn after hymn in Montagnais. All of them received Communion. Then, after the Christmas meal and a short sleep, they returned

for the high Mass, sung by Father Laffont. During this I preached in Montagnais, as I had at midnight. In the afternoon there were confirmations and a sermon.

Next day, all were present at Mass and many again received Communion. The rest of the day was given up to private interviews with the chiefs and others who kept coming and going. There was always someone in the common room and so much news to tell. I spoke to them about the Pope and my various travels, while they entertained me with their own affairs and made me a present of a few animal tongues dried and powdered.

19: *Project to Reunite the Two Vicariates*

ON JANUARY 20, 1908, I left the Nativity for Providence mission, where I examined, with Fathers Giroux and Laperrière, plans for the enlargement of our boarding school. It was agreed that two scows, towed by our steamer, the *Sainte-Marie*, would bring the necessary timber. The scows would then be used for fishing, at Grosse Ile and Beaver Lake, with the aid of a little steam tug, the *Providence*, bought for this purpose the year before. The transporting of the catch by rowboat at the end of the autumn fishing was really too laborious a job for our Brothers; it was also too slow and often too dangerous.

News arrived of the death of the Superior General of the Oblates, Father Lavillardièrre, who had been elected eighteen months before. Consequently a new Chapter was summoned to meet in Rome on September 17.

At Montreal I joined Bishop Grouard, and found there a letter awaiting me, dated August 27, from Archbishop Langevin:

"This is just a short note to beg you to succeed Bishop Grouard and reunite the two vicariates of Athabasca and Mackenzie under your jurisdiction. It will be necessary to draw up a memorandum for the reunion, and a terna for your nomination as Vicar Apostolic of the two vicariates. I willingly authorize you, therefore, to put my name to the petition and the terna, writing: The Archbishop of St. Boniface, S.G. Monseigneur Legal, Undersigned . . . and you can sign on my behalf. Anything agreed to by Bishop Grouard and yourself, I approve. † Adélar, O.M.I., *Archbishop of St. Boniface*."

I had thought this project shelved long ago. This is the history of it. I have been able to discover only two documents, but they are enough to explain the whole business.

The first is the draft of my report to Cardinal Gotti, then Prefect of Propaganda. Dated November 5, 1906, it was drawn up on the occasion of the proposal to make the Yukon an independent prefecture:

"II. — On the project of reuniting Mackenzie and Athabasca, my views are as follows:

"1. Whether the union takes place immediately or at a later date, it does not affect the question of the Yukon, the interests of which are so distinct that it should be separated as soon as possible.

"2. If I proposed the reunion, it was merely to take advantage of the repartitioning occasioned by the Yukon to obtain a ruling on a question to which, in my humble opinion, the Sacred Congregation will have to return before long.

"3. At present the Mackenzie vicariate, with its slender revenues and grant from the Propagation of the Faith, is able to carry on. But if assistance from the Propagation of the Faith should decrease, or fail altogether, as events in France lead one to fear may happen, help will have to be sought elsewhere, for there are no resources in this country except fish and game.

"If the reunion took place, the future would be more assured, because Athabasca, without any appreciable increase in costs, could use its own means of transport to serve the Mackenzie as far as Smith Landing; moreover its farms, already numerous and flourishing in the Peace River district, could supply, at any rate in part, the Mackenzie missions.

"4. It is unnecessary to repeat the other reasons I have urged for the reunion, and I accept in advance the decision of the Holy See. If Mackenzie remains separate, I humbly request to remain in charge of it, because I am accustomed to the natives and speak their language. If Mackenzie is joined to Athabasca, I still request, and with equal urgency, to be left as auxiliary to Bishop Grouard, for the same reasons, and also because he, owing to his

age, could not administer the whole vicariate by himself. It is also my opinion that when the extent of the country evangelized requires two bishops, it would be preferable if the general administration and responsibility for the northern missions remained in the hands of whoever is primarily in charge of the southern.

"5. It is unnecessary to think of retiring Bishop Grouard in order to entrust the two united vicariates to me. This would make a very bad impression, both on the natives and the missionaries, and my ministry would thus be rendered more difficult. If Bishop Grouard were to retain general control, at least for two or three years, then perhaps, if my health permitted it, I might be entrusted with the whole. But I confess I should always be reluctant to take over new territories, and in such a case I would much prefer to remain simply as auxiliary to Bishop Grouard's successor."

A word of explanation may help the reader to understand the situation rather better. Bishop Grouard had always regretted that I had not been left with him to be the "staff of his old age." For my part I had regretted, perhaps even more keenly, that I had ever been removed from his jurisdiction.

So, as soon as it was proposed, with some chance of success, to make the Yukon a separate prefecture, annexing to it the northern part of Columbia, Bishop Grouard and I began to think of joining forces again so that we could work together. I think it was I who first made the suggestion, for the reasons I gave to Cardinal Gotti. Bishop Grouard agreed at once, on condition that I was put in charge of the two united districts. This I refused point blank. The subject cropped up on various occasions, each of us sticking to his own point of view. But Bishop Grouard became more and more insistent: "Your place is on the Peace River," he told me. "I am too old. . . . Besides, I have earned my retirement."

He felt that the arrival of so many colonists of every nationality was becoming too much for him. When I saw that he was thinking seriously of resigning, and the burden was likely to fall on my shoulders—a burden I could never accept, my health being

what it was—I wrote to Archbishop Langevin of St. Boniface, suggesting the idea of a coadjutor, with right of succession, to Bishop Grouard. This was the latter's reaction to the proposal:

"Archbishop Langevin has shown me your letter in which you advise him to give me a coadjutor *chosen from this vicariate*, since I am unwilling to have you. I thank you for your kindly interest on my behalf, but you do not go far enough. Certainly I need a successor, and *whatever you say* no one would think it odd to allow an old man to give up his work and prepare for eternity. But as for reuniting Mackenzie and Athabasca, I do not think this is truly desirable. If the Yukon had not come to aggravate the situation, I would not have asked for the division because I never thought it would have been granted. However, there was talk of it for some time. Now that the division has been effected, I personally would never consent to a reunion, the responsibility for which would be mine. Of course, if I were allowed to retire, I would obviously have no objection to any step it was proposed to take, especially if you were willing to take charge of the whole . . ."

So the project had been definitely abandoned, or so I thought. Imagine my surprise, therefore, at getting Archbishop Langevin's letter. However, I waited till I was on board the boat before mentioning it to Bishop Grouard.

"Yes," he said, "it was I who pressed the matter. The decision is now taken. The reunion of Mackenzie and Athabasca is to take place. You will be in charge of them and I shall retire. . ."

"I couldn't possibly accept," I objected.

"They will make you," he retorted.

When the voyage came to an end he told me he had changed his mind and would ask for a coadjutor. Pius X allowed him one in the person of Bishop Célestin Jaussard.

We arrived at London for the International Eucharistic Congress and from there proceeded to Rome where we elected Bishop Dontenwill of Vancouver as superior general of the Oblate Congregation.

Constantly suffering as I was from inflammation of the throat,

I consulted a specialist at Lyons who ordered an unpleasant treatment which did me no good.

"Your throat," he told me, "is in a pitiable state; I can't promise you any improvement under six months' time."

I could not spare him six months, so I went on to Paris. My host, Count de La Sizeranne, hastily summoned his own doctor, who diagnosed the case thus: "Your throat is in a lamentable state (the verdict of the Lyons specialist), your stomach is all out of order, your heart threatened with a lesion, and your liver congested. No one of your organs is functioning normally. Luckily," he added with a perfectly straight face, "you have an excellent constitution. Few people could have stood up to what you have. All your organs are perfectly healthy but, as I was saying, none of them is functioning properly."

"What's the cause, Doctor?"

"Your nervous system. It's like a run-down battery. It can't transmit to the organs the vital current necessary to keep them active. That's why you have always one or the other backing up on you. Just at present, not one is acting properly. But there's nothing organically wrong."

"And the remedy?"

"Treating your nerves; a daily massage all over with eau de Cologne and a hair glove, that and eight to ten months of complete rest with good living."

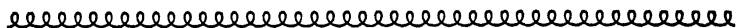
"And that will cure my throat?"

"Yes. It's not your throat that's wrong; it's your nervous system that's gone completely flat."

After six weeks of the massage treatment I was already feeling better and decided to set out without consulting the doctor. This was the gravest sin I ever committed against my health.

I spent the summer months of 1909 visiting my missions along the Mackenzie.

20: *Apostolate Among the Eskimos*



ON SEPTEMBER 6, 1910, there took place the International Eucharistic Congress at Montreal, one of the most stirring demonstrations of faith I have ever witnessed. Alas, my nervous troubles prevented my taking part in all the ceremonies. Afterward Father Lemius, who had been superior of the Oblates at the Sacré Coeur in Paris, dragged me over to France for treatment. I remained there some months, returning to Mackenzie in the spring of 1911.

An important decision was now reached, that of resuming our apostolate among the Eskimos.

The first Catholic priest to visit them had been Father Grollier. He encountered them at Fort McPherson and there baptized four of them on September 14, 1860.

"On the day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross," he wrote to one of his brethren, "having brought together the Loucheux and Eskimos round that sign of reconciliation, I asked the two chiefs to draw near, and cross their hands at the foot of the Cross. I then requested them to kiss the Cross as a symbol of friendship and peace, between them and with God. Placing both their hands upon the foot of the crucifix, they promised for the future to love one another. Thus the Cross united me, a child of the Mediterranean, with these dwellers in the icy regions of the polar sea. Annihilating space, the Cross now ruled *a mari usque ad mare*. Moreover, I gave the Eskimo chief a cross, beneath which I had inscribed the words of the prophecy which was now being fulfilled: *Viderunt omnes termini terrae salutare Dei nostri* ('No corner of the world but has witnessed how our

God can save'); and to the Loucheux chief I presented an image of the Mother of our Saviour, with that other prophecy which has proved so true: *Beatam me dicent omnes generationes* ('All generations shall call me blessed'). It was on this grand feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross that the great nation of Eskimos offered its first fruits to the Church and several became children of God by receiving baptism."

In 1865 Father Petitot, accompanied by M. Gaudet, chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, went to the mouth of the Anderson River and there met several Eskimo families. In the spring of 1868 he made another attempt, this time toward the West; but he was already beginning to suffer from that painful disease which later compelled him to leave the North. Obsessed by the fear of being killed by the Eskimos, he abandoned his canoe, baggage and guide and taking to the shore, returned to the little Red River, where Father Séguin then was.

In 1891 Father Camille Lefebvre set out from Good Hope to visit the Eskimos of Fort McPherson. There his reception was friendly, but he could remain only a week. The following year he established himself permanently at Fort McPherson and from there he made three journeys to the Eskimos of Richard Island and three to those of Herschell Island.

The result of all these visits was virtually nil, because of the fanaticism of an interpreter. Then, in 1898, owing to a shortage of priests to meet the spiritual needs of the numerous Catholics among the gold prospectors attracted to the Klondike, Bishop Grouard was obliged to take Father Lefebvre away from his Eskimos and send him to the Yukon.

When I took over my vicariate in 1902, Father Giroux dissuaded me from making another attempt to evangelize these poor folk. "There's no hope of converting them," he told me. His conviction was based on the fact that they had been corrupted by the whalers from San Francisco and elsewhere who wintered among them at Herschell Island and on the Arctic coast.

Yet every spring, packed into their whaling boats with their

dogs, the Eskimos came and spent several weeks on the Arctic Red River to lay in a store of dried fish. Every year, when I visited this mission of the Holy Name of Mary, I noticed that the Eskimos were getting more and more friendly to us. Of their own accord they came to the mission, and one could see them trying to understand the illustrated catechism which decorated the hall. But there was no one to explain it to them.

On the occasion of the first visit of our steamer, the *Sainte-Marie*, I invited Chief Paukiak to sail a few miles with me. He accepted with evident delight, took his kayak and came aboard. On returning he could find no words to express his thanks, so proud and happy he was to have sailed aboard the Bishop's vessel.

Next year no Eskimo whalers appeared at the Red River. The Protestant minister at Fort McPherson, disturbed at the friendly relations between us, had forbidden his Eskimos to come. I thought this looked promising, so from that moment I was on the lookout for an opportunity to resume our apostolate among these "Raw-Meat-Eaters." But I placed my hopes most strongly in those who lived to the northeast of the Great Bear Lake. "No one knows how many they are, or what they are like," I had written in my report to the Oblate Chapter General in 1904; "but we would like to send a few specimens to Paradise!" However, I had to add sadly: "No men . . . no resources."

While we were visiting the St. Thérèse mission at Fort Norman, Father Ducot handed to me the following letter, which had every appearance of an invitation from heaven.

"December 28, 1910

"To the Reverend Father Ducot, R. C. Mission, Fort Norman: We have met a party of Eskimos who come every year. This summer there were eight men, six women and some children. Mr. Stevenson, who came here with three Eskimos from Herschell Island, told me there was another band of them quite near. The Eskimos come at the end of August and leave when the first snow falls. They seem very intelligent . . .

"The Eskimos and Indians are frightened of each other and it would be dangerous for Indians to try to meet Eskimos without having a white man with them, because the Eskimos have a bad opinion of the Indians. If you intend sending someone to meet the Eskimos, we shall be pleased to give you all the help we can. Signed: J. Hornby"

The letter came from Great Bear Lake, where the author was engaged in trapping and exploring.

On July 4, about one in the afternoon, we arrived at Good Hope mission, where I immediately took young Father Rouvière aside. I told him to read the Mr. Hornby's letter and asked if he would venture to go alone to see how the land lay. "I will do everything I can," I added, "to send someone to keep you company next year."

With happiness in his eyes and a smile on his lips, the good Father answered me with the words of Isaias: *Ecce ego, mitte me*. I embraced him and gave him my blessing. "Go and pack," I said. At midnight I said Mass for our Hare Indians and at two in the morning we set out. Father Rouvière came aboard with us. He was to go as far as the Fort Norman mission, thence to make his own way across Great Bear Lake.

21: *First Contacts with the Copper Eskimos*



CHRISTMAS 1911 was celebrated in festive style at St. Michael's mission at Fort Rae. Our Dog Rib Indians appeared in great numbers; there were a hundred and eighty communions and fifty confirmations. My next call was at Providence mission, whence I set out again on January 22, 1912. On the journey I suffered a new attack of acute tonsillitis, the worst I had ever had. On my arriving at the Fort River, it was impossible to get warm in the old house where Father Vacher lived. My friend the Reverend Mr. Lucas, the Protestant minister there, gave me a little medicine but I became steadily worse and was on the point of asking for the last sacraments.

I scribbled a letter to Archbishop Langevin, telling him of my plight and suggesting the name of my successor. Meanwhile I heard Father Vacher saying to Brother Marc: "Bishop Breynat is much worse . . . what are we to do if he dies?"

Their concern was very understandable. In the circumstances, how were they to bury me properly? There was not even a plank of wood to make a coffin, and not an Indian within miles. Happily the last abscess burst and I felt greatly relieved and was able to resume the journey. On March 3, after two nights in the open on the shore of Great Slave Lake, my companions deposited me safe and sound at Fort Resolution.

On August 18, 1911, Father Rouvière wrote to me as follows from his hut on the Dease River:

"You sent me, Monseigneur, to see and meet the Eskimos. The meeting took place on August 15 between six and seven in the evening. The Blessed Virgin has blessed my steps and pro-

tected me so far. I think she will continue to do so and my mission will prosper.

"For two days I traversed the plains with Mr. Hornby, hoping to encounter Eskimos not far from the Dease River. We learned from an Indian that they were in the neighborhood of the river, but the 14th was wet and foggy; visibility was poor and it was difficult to find our direction. Mr. Hornby had a compass, but that day he had left it at our camping place. Finding no Eskimos at the place where they camped last year, we returned to our tent on the river bank.

"Next day, August 15, we set off early, resolved not to return till we had seen them. . . . After walking all day and seeing nothing, we arrived about five at the camping ground of the Fort Rae Indians; two of these told us the direction in which the Eskimos were probably to be found. We set out and walked about an hour and a half, still without any success. The mountain we were aiming at, instead of drawing nearer, seemed to be getting farther away. And the farther we went, the farther away we left our camping place. To get back, we should have to walk half the night, for by now it was getting late. I suddenly had the idea of turning back, but Mr. Hornby would have none of it and he decided to go on. I started back and after walking for about three-quarters of an hour I caught sight of three shapes on the summit of a hill. Were they caribou? Or men? I couldn't distinguish and quickened my pace in order to find out. After ten minutes I saw a crowd of people on the side of a knoll. There was no longer any doubt: they were Eskimos.

"As soon as they could see me they began to move in my direction, then at some distance away one of them took the lead and approached me with his arms upraised, bending his head to the right, then bowing down his whole body to the ground. He did this several times. At first I made no movement, but seeing him repeating the same signs over and over again, I answered by just raising my arm. I then noticed he was increasing his pace and that all the rest were hurrying after him. It was their sign of salutation.

"When the first Eskimo was near enough to recognize me, he

stopped a moment, then turned to his companions and shouted: '*Krabluna*: it is a white man.'

"He then ran forward and approached me, all smiles, holding out his hand. I gave him mine, then he took me by the arm and presented me to all the rest. I was wearing my soutane and carried my Oblate's cross. This last immediately attracted their attention. As they gazed at it I did my best by signs to make them understand that He who was on the cross had sacrificed His life for us. Then I gave them some medals, which I hung round their necks. They were overjoyed at this and I went with them to their camp where I shook hands with others. Immediately the whole crowd was round me, showering me with questions or requests. I tried to make them understand that I had come to stay with them, at which they all wanted to go along with me to fetch my belongings.

"One of them came back with me to my tent, where we arrived about two o'clock in the morning. It rained all next day, but on the following morning I started off to pay them a second visit. I was received with the same enthusiasm as the first time; but as I was accompanied by a number of Indians from Bear Lake, it was not easy to converse with them even by signs; they were too busy trading in what the Indians had brought with them. They were also far too pleased and excited. These Eskimos are really hospitable people; all the time the Indians were with them, they could think of nothing but giving them food and showing them all their possessions. There was a continual coming and going. The first impression they made on me was very favorable, and I think, if one could meet them often, it would be possible to do a great deal of good. If so, it is time to start, for they are beginning to go on board the whalers, and there is danger of their being spoiled like the Eskimos of the Mackenzie delta. Already one of them has a carbine, which he acquired in exchange for eight white foxes.

"In order to meet them more often, the only thing to do is to go and winter in the neighborhood of Dismal Lake. In a few days we are going there to fix up some sort of shelter for the

winter. I think it will be easy to have an Eskimo family with us. That is my intention and I shall do my best to carry it out. Their language doesn't seem very difficult and Father Petitot's dictionary is going to prove very useful; the words are often the same, or very similar."

This first encounter with the Copper Eskimos certainly seemed to augur well for the future.

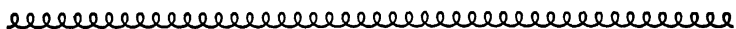
Next year I met Father Rouvière again at Fort Norman, where he was enjoying a short rest. At Good Hope I asked young Father Le Roux to go and help Father Rouvière, and the two Oblates, so soon to be martyrs, set out on July 15.

On September 1 I returned to Fort Smith. There Father Gouy and the Brothers showed me the progress they had made with their new house. A little more hard work and the community would be able to move in.

Meanwhile I went to spend a few days at our St. Bruno farm. I could not admire too extravagantly the good humor of Father Roure and Brothers Le Gall and Dallé, and the supernatural spirit so evident in their devotion and self-sacrifice. They worked from morning to night. The building was well advanced; so were the haymaking and other tasks. I would have liked to prolong my stay with such a wonderful little community, which recalled all the poverty and intimacy of Bethlehem.

After returning to Fort Smith, on September 22, I blessed the new house and sang Mass in the provisional church on the first floor. Next day, in the presence of eight Oblates, including those from the St. Bruno farm, the community was formally installed in its new residence. On the 27th I left by canoe, with Brother Joseph Lecou and an Indian.

22: *The Fort Simpson Hospital Sale of the "Sainte-Marie"*



IN 1912 there was a question of transferring me to Prince Albert, where the bishop, Monseigneur Pascal, was thinking of retiring. I wrote to Archbishop Langevin as follows:

"Even if Bishop Pascal were to resign, it would be idle to think of the proposal you have made to me. Apart from the fact that I am quite unprepared for such a task, my strength would not allow me to accomplish it properly.

"No, I will stay here as long as I can. If I find I am unable to discharge my main obligations, I will resign, and then offer myself to some indulgent bishop as his auxiliary, willing but infirm. For the moment, I shall try and hang on where I am . . ."

Archbishop Langevin replied (November 17, 1912):

"My dear Monseigneur: At our bishops' conference at St. Boniface (on the 13th, 14th and 15th of this month) I read from your very touching letter the passage concerning your proposal of resigning and asking a bishop to accept you as his auxiliary.

"To my great satisfaction Bishop Pascal said immediately, 'Let him come as auxiliary to me. I will put him in charge of my cathedral and treat him well.'

"We all unanimously seconded the good bishop and asked him to write about it to the Delegate, which he has done.

"You are a bishop, fully capable of ruling an established diocese; you have the necessary experience, you are as much of a Canadian as we are; the diocese and episcopate can therefore count on you. If you hesitate to accept for personal reasons, have the charity to accept for the good of souls, *rogo te ardentius*. You

will then have to submit your resignation to Cardinal Gotti, through His Excellency the Apostolic Delegate."

But when it came to the point, Bishop Pascal changed his mind.

As we had contemplated founding a hospital at Fort Simpson, I went to Ottawa to discuss it with Mr. Frank Pedley, superintendent general of Indian Affairs. Having thrashed out the whole project we reached this agreement: we were to build the hospital at our own expense; the Department of Indian Affairs promised a grant of fifteen hundred dollars toward the cost of furnishing it and undertook to provide all medical supplies. Once the hospital was functioning, we were to receive a dollar a day for each patient up to a total of one thousand days, and sixty-five cents thereafter. According to a letter I later received from Dr. Scott, Mr. Pedley's successor, this allowance was then the "usual grant" for hospitalized Indians.

It was certainly not over-generous. In fact it was plainly inadequate, especially in the North where the cost of living is so high. And apart from that, the Indians in those days used to come to us, from their forests, more or less in rags. We had to clothe them, and warmly too. However, I accepted this scale, privately resolving to get it increased gradually, which eventually it was. (In 1946 the matter was raised again in the Council of the Northwestern Territories by Mr. R. A. Gibson, the commissioner, and his assistant, Mr. A. Cummings, with the result that we then received \$2.50 for each Indian patient.)

With the Fort Simpson question settled, I sought authority to found another hospital at Fort Smith on the same terms. Mr. Pedley agreed, but we would have to rely on God to find the money to do our share.

On June 9, 1913, Father Gouy and I chose a site at Fort Smith. On the 12th we were at Fort Resolution, where we spent ten busy days, settling all our plans. The hospital and school at Fort Simpson were to be built of wood squared off in the forest; the Fathers and Brothers of the mission would see to this, and all

that was necessary was to find them what they required for flooring, roof and interior walls. But the hospital and school at Fort Smith were to be built with beams and planks, and our sawmill would have to cope with all this.

On our return to Fort Smith, there occurred a quite unexpected coincidence. The Hudson's Bay Company had just installed a sawmill on an island five miles away from the fort. Captain Mills, who was in charge of it, came to pay me a visit. He was in the best of humor, very satisfied with his installation, and delighted with the results. He talked at length of the fine tall trees to be found on the island itself, of how wonderfully well his machines were working and what excellent teams he had to work them. He felt, in short, that he could safely defy any possible competition. Clearly my warm congratulations touched a sensitive spot. After enlarging, after his fashion, on the great economies to be effected by having such tall trees close at hand, I asked him casually:

"What price would you ask for planks and beams?"

"Twenty dollars a thousand feet."

"Delivered at the quayside at Fort Smith?"

"Certainly."

"Could you let me have the stuff by next autumn?"

"Easily. How much do you want?"

I soon drew up a list. This included, however, only the heavy material: foundations, heavy timber, joists, rafters and thick planks. I preferred to trust to our own mill for the planed and moulded wood. I invited the Captain to sign the contract there and then and we parted good friends. This was a stroke of luck and a great relief to our own personnel. Those long, thick pieces of lumber would have been the ones most difficult to come by.

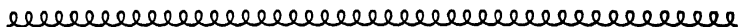
We sailed from Fort Smith with two scows in tow, loaded with supplies for ourselves and the Hislop and Nagle Company. We had two of their directors on board with us, Mr. Slater and Mr. Sawle. Our *Sainte-Marie* behaved wonderfully. Great Slave Lake was calm, we steamed at a good rate, and with no diffi-

culty at all negotiated the dangerous Trout Island narrows. Soon we were at the end of Beaver Lake, and after we rounded Auray Point we caught sight, to our left, of Providence mission. The weather was perfect and everyone was in the best of spirits when suddenly we felt the keel of our boat foul a rock. In no time at all, so strong was the current, we were firmly aground on a bank of gravel.

A year before, we had had the same mishap at the very same spot. For two hours we had tried every means we could think of to refloat our craft, but all in vain. Fortunately, the Hudson's Bay Company's steamer, the *Mackenzie*, was returning from her trip to Fort McPherson. We signaled her and she steered toward us. Since she drew very little water at any time, and still less now that she had discharged her cargo, she could approach us without danger. With the aid of a stout cable and her powerful engines we were back in mid-channel a quarter of an hour later. The maneuver cost us \$200, payable to Captain Mills.

But this year, the second accident set me thinking. Perhaps this was a warning from heaven. Might not this be the time to dispose of our boat? Here were the two directors of Hislop and Nagle. Why not put out a feeler about their buying it? They were tempted by the idea but were short of capital. That was no objection. Quite a small instalment would seal the contract and the rest could be paid off by transporting the provisions for our missions for the next five years—at fifty cents for one hundred pounds of weight, instead of the dollar generally charged. They would thus be assured of a reasonable profit, and the general cost would be covered by the freightage of their own supplies. Another advantage was that they could then legitimately compete with the Hudson's Bay Company. I succeeded in convincing them and the bargain was concluded.

23: *The Murder of Fathers Rouvière and Le Roux*



ON DECEMBER 31, 1913, we received a real Christmas present in the person of young Father Pierre Fallaize, newly arrived from Normandy. The early months of 1914 then passed uneventfully until, at the beginning of August, I heard of the outbreak of war.

My first thought was of my missionaries, nearly all of them Frenchmen. The younger ones, who were liable to mobilization, would have to report, otherwise they would be tried as deserters. I took a train to Montreal and hastened to see the French consul general, M. Bonin. Though reputed to be an anticlerical, he received me very cordially and promised to obtain a six months' deferment for my missionaries.

In February, 1915, I sailed from New York on the *Patria* for Rome. There I was paternally received by Benedict XV. The object of my journey was to get our general administration to send over one of its members to visit the enormous field of our apostolate so that our needs could be better understood. It was decided that Father Isidore Belle, formerly a missionary in Ceylon, should come back with me, and we started for Canada on March 5.

At Montreal a telegram from Edmonton, dispatched by Fathers Lefebvre and Duchaussois, informed me of disturbing rumors concerning Fathers Rouvière and Le Roux.

"An Eskimo has announced by signs the death of two whites. He has had no communication with the band that accompanied the Fathers. Their house was pillaged by Eskimos of a different tribe."

I had the honor to be on friendly terms with the controller of the Royal Canadian Police at Ottawa, so I went to see him at his office. Since he was away at the time, I left him a letter, with a copy of the telegram, and suggested he should send along some members of the force. He replied:

"I have made the necessary arrangements for a thorough investigation.

"For your personal information I send you confidentially a copy of the instructions given to Inspector La Nauze, who has been chosen to take charge of the patrol detailed to make the investigation, and I am sure you will approve of this choice.

"Trusting that he will find the priests alive and well and that the rumor of their murder is without foundation, I remain, sincerely yours, Laurence Fortescue."

After this I was sent the following letter received by Father Houssais from Father Ducot:

"Alas, it seems certain that our two dear Fathers Rouvière and Le Roux are dead. All the Eskimos have said as much to the Indians at the end of Bear Lake. Mr. Arden and Mr. Heb, who have been to the Dease River, have given us this sad news.

"They told me the Eskimos rifled the Fathers' house (or houses) and dressed themselves up in their soutanes, breeches, surplices and Mass vestments. Their chapel has disappeared. The Eskimos who came to the Dease River were apparently not those with whom the Fathers had associated in previous years. Or rather there were a number of strangers mingled with the old lot, and these newcomers were of a different type. The Eskimos said that the Fathers' dogs were also dead, but ignorance of the Eskimo language prevented me from gathering any details. The Tinnehs of Bear Lake said that the Fathers started off with their sled, a little after the Eskimos. One Eskimo, the only one wearing a soutane, when asked by Mr. Arden who had given him that coat, said it was a white man, a whaler. This was obviously a lie . . ."

At the same time, Father Laperrière wrote to me from St. Michael's mission:

"You may be better informed than we are about Fathers Rouvière and Le Roux. However, in case you have heard nothing, this is the story that was told to us, a fortnight ago, by Bear Lake Indians. According to them, the two priests after starting off with the Eskimos were never seen again. Just before the ice melted last spring, some Indians went to the Fathers' house where they found the door had been broken down, the chimney demolished, and snare wire and other objects scattered over the ice. Inside the house there were still traces of wet shoeprints on the floor. The Eskimos must have been in the act of rifling the place when they saw the Indians approaching and hastily made off. This winter the Indians round here met an Eskimo and his son, at the far end of the woods, and asked them where the Fathers were. At this question, the Eskimo boy ran away as though he were frightened, but his father appeared to take no notice and stayed four days with the Indians."

On the other hand Mr. Cornwall, a very good friend of mine, sent me the direct evidence of Mr. Arden. Speaking of the Eskimo he had found wearing a cassock, he said:

"When I asked him where he had got it, he said he had it from a white man who had come from the Arctic shore. I knew that was a lie. He was very excited. The other Eskimos told me he was a bad lot, and so was his wife. The Coppermine Eskimos seem to be afraid of those from Bathurst Bay. They told me that the latter were bad people. This, I found out later, was true. The priests had been warned to be well on their guard when they went among them."

The only thing we could do now was to await the result of Inspector La Nauze's investigations. He had taken Father Frapsauce from Fort Norman to help in his investigations and also an excellent interpreter from Fort McPherson, called Ilavinik.

The patrol left Fort Norman on July 22, 1915. Finding no Eskimos in the neighborhood of the Fathers' house at Dease Bay, they continued their search in the Barren Land as far as a kind of wooded oasis, known as "Big Stick Island." The Es-

kimos were accustomed to come here in spring to collect wood for building their big sleighs. Undoubtedly they suspected they were the subject of investigations, for they had made no appearance that summer. The Fathers' second house on Lake Imerenick was in ruins, having been pillaged some time before. This was a bitter disappointment, especially for Father Frapsauce who, not being equipped for the winter, took leave of his companions and returned to Fort Norman.

On March 29, 1916, the patrol set out a second time. After fruitless questioning, they at last met two Eskimos on May 7, who seemed to tell the truth. The interpreter asked them point blank who had killed the two white men, and they named the two murderers, Sinnisiak and Uluksak.

Then tongues began to wag. Among the Eskimos who hastened to have their say was one called Koeha, an elderly man who appeared to have the confidence of the rest. He was invited to tell what he knew of the facts. "Without any hesitation," the Inspector reported, "Koeha gave a clear and concise account of the whole affair as it had been related to him. . . . According to the information we could gather there and in other villages, a cruel and bloody murder was perpetrated . . ."

The Inspector summed up the circumstances, which we shall return to later, but he ended by saying: "It is evident that the Eskimos have greatly regretted this murder. All have said that the priests were very good white men. 'They brought us,' they say, 'powder and shot and taught us how to catch fish with nets.'"

In his official deposition, Koeha confirmed this statement.

"The two men who killed the whites," he declared, "do not belong to my people. All the Eskimos are very sad." He also added that he had wept when he saw the body of Father Le Roux all covered with blood.

The following is the testimony of a certain Hupo:

"When people told me that the white men had been killed by Sinnisiak and Uluksak, I was very sorry and could not sleep all the next night."

I must stress here, in connection with the murderers' trial, this evidence of the general esteem in which our martyrs were held. It must also be remembered that there was no witness to the murder, apart from the murderers themselves. One of the Eskimos' commonest sins is lying, and it is noticeable that in all the depositions gathered by Inspector La Nauze there is no mention of the ill-treatment which the murderers claim to have suffered in order to plead legitimate self-defense.

Sinnisiak was arrested by Inspector La Nauze on May 15 near Forsyth Bay on Victoria Island. Behind him, hidden by caribou skins, were found a loaded carbine and two large knives. On May 22, Uluksak was arrested on a little island at the mouth of Coppermine River. All that could be found with him was a bow and a few arrows. Both prisoners were taken to Herschell Island, where the Inspector kept them under guard pending a decision by the Minister of Justice.

Father Duchaussois, who was present at every sitting of the court, was able to reconstruct the murder as follows:

"The missionaries left Lake Imerenick on October 8, 1913. Both of them were ill; Father Le Roux had a heavy cold and Father Rouvière had sustained an injury while building the house at Dease Bay. They were accompanied by a large band of Eskimos, among them Sinnisiak and Kormik.

"They took twelve days to cover the 90 miles from the Arctic Ocean, and on the 20th or 22nd of October Father Rouvière wrote: 'We arrived at the mouth of the Copper River. Some families have already left. *Disillusioned*, as far as the Eskimos are concerned, we are threatened with famine and don't know what to do.'

"This was the last sentence he wrote, and the first occasion on which Father Rouvière ever spoke with anything like bitterness of his flock.

"The camp was threatened with famine because the fishing was very precarious and there were no reindeer. The Fathers, who were lodged with the Eskimos for five or six days in Kormik's tent, had very little food, and what they had was presently stolen by Kormik's wife.

"During the last night, Kormik stole up to Father Le Roux's pillow, removed his carbine and hid it.

"Whatever the native etiquette, which makes it impossible (so it is alleged) to refuse anything one is asked for, the Fathers couldn't tolerate theft. For a white man to venture into those regions without a gun would be to condemn himself to starvation.

"The weapon was therefore recovered by its owner. At this, Kormik burst in and hurled himself furiously upon Father Le Roux with the intention of killing him. But a brave old man, Koeha, intervened. He seized the aggressor round the waist, overcame him and forced him to stay in his tent. Koeha then took the missionaries aside and warned them that their lives were in danger. 'Kormik and his crowd are after your blood,' he told them. 'You must return to your hut right away. Next year, you will come back in better company.' With that he helped them to get ready their sled and four dogs. Then he went with them a half-day's march, both to defend them from other possible attacks and to guide them in the best direction. 'There are no trees here,' he said, when they had gone up river as far as the track that goes off across the Barren Land; 'go on as far as you can. After that you will have no more trouble. I am your friend. I don't want anyone to do you harm.' Then, after cordially shaking hands, he left them.

"How did the missionaries spend the next three nights, after Koeha had left them, we shall never know. They must have suffered a great deal, for it was very cold and they had no tent to shelter them, no wood to make a fire and hardly anything to eat.

"It was during the second of these nights that Sinnisiak and Uluksak, satisfied that Koeha and his people were asleep, set out from the camp and began following the trail of the sled in the snow. They easily overtook the famished missionaries, and their exhausted team who, hampered by the soft snow, could do only four or five miles a day in this rough and undulating Barren Land.

"It was midday. To explain their presence, and also to give themselves time to choose a favorable moment, the Eskimos explained that they were going on ahead of their families, who were delayed in returning to Bear Lake. 'As we are going in the same direction,' they suggested, 'we will help you draw your sled till we rejoin our own people.'

"The Eskimos regard it as perfectly natural to harness themselves to a sled and do not think it in the least humiliating. In their long journeys, all the members of the family take a hand: the women at the head of the team, the dogs in the middle and the men behind. And how often missionaries in the North have done the same.

"When evening came on, Sinnisiak and Uluksak withdrew towards the river, to camp. In the morning they returned to the sled, but that day, too, they found no opportunity to strike. Next day the wind rose and soon a violent tempest was let loose. The snow whirled down, thick and blinding. Progress became more and more difficult.

"Sinnisiak decided that the time had come. He murmured a few instructions in the ear of Uluksak and both took off their harness. Sinnisiak went round behind the sled, but Father Le Roux, now very suspicious, continued to keep an eye on him. The wretch then had recourse to a stratagem. He made as though to take off his belt, pleading a necessity of nature. The priest looked away, whereupon the scoundrel rushed at him and stabbed him in the back with his heavy knife.

"The wounded man staggered forward, uttering a cry as he did so; but he had scarcely got beyond the front of the sled when he was set upon by Uluksak. 'Finish him off!' shouted Sinnisiak; 'I'll deal with the other one!'

"Father Le Roux grasped the savage by the shoulders, making an appeal to his pity; but, deaf to his entreaties, Uluksak stabbed him twice with his knife, once in the stomach and once through the heart.

"Meanwhile, having heard his cry of distress, Father Rouvière ran back, but seeing the other priest prostrate on the ground

and Sinnisiak leveling the carbine he had taken from the sled, he fled in the direction of the river. The first shot fired by the assassin missed him, but the second caught him in the back and he sank in a sitting posture in the snow.

"The two Eskimos ran after him.

"Finish him off!" ordered Sinnisiak again.

"Uluksak plunged his still reeking blade into the priest who fell back into the snow now reddened with his blood. As Father Rouvière was still breathing and his lips still moved, Sinnisiak went back to the sled to fetch the axe the missionaries used for working. Returning to the dying man, he cut off his legs, arms and head. Then he tore apart the quivering entrails and Uluksak seized a piece of the liver which the two monsters proceeded to consume.

"After throwing the corpse into a ravine, they returned to Father Le Roux, cut him open and devoured his liver too.

"The horrible feast over, they collected the ammunition in the sled and returned to the camp, where they proclaimed what they had done.

"We have killed the white men,' they told Kormik when they arrived.

"The crime was committed between October 28 and November 2, 1913, in the afternoon, 16 miles above Bloodyfalls. Father Rouvière died a few yards from the river; Father Le Roux about a hundred yards away, in the marsh.

"A number of Eskimos, good and bad, were at the scene of the slaughter next day, where they found the four dogs standing guard over their masters. Some of them — Kormik among them — helped themselves to various effects. The others, like Koeha (who described the scene in detail), saw with sorrow 'how the good white men had died.'

"I was very sad,' said Koeha, 'at the death of the two good white men and I wanted to go and see them. When I got there I saw the body of a man without life, beside the sled. It was Illogoak (Father Le Roux) and I began to weep. I did not see Kouliavik (Father Rouvière). The snow covered Illogoak's

face, all except the nose. He was lying on his back beside the sled, with his head raised. The men who killed him had opened his stomach and cut out the insides with a knife . . . I was very fond of the two good white men. They were very good to us.’”

The Honorable Doherty, Minister of Justice, arraigned the accused for trial before the Supreme Court at Edmonton. Sinnisiak and Uluksak arrived in the capital of Alberta on August 8, 1917. There they excited demonstrations, both of crude curiosity and lively sympathy. During the following days, before the court sat, they were even taken to the cinema “as a special treat.”

The trial opened on August 14. Mr. Harvey had been chosen judge; Mr. C. C. MacKaul, K.C., was prosecuting for the Crown, and Mr. J. E. Wallbridge appeared for the defense. The jury was composed as follows: J. E. Mould, R. B. Ferguson, John Kenwood, A. F. Fugh, John Harrold and W. H. Martin. Two prominent Catholics of Edmonton had been summoned to be jurymen, but they were successfully challenged by the defense.

The counsel of the Crown chose to prosecute separately and indict Sinnisiak for the murder of Father Rouvière. It was a clear case. Sinnisiak admitted having been the instigator and perpetrator of the crime; he had shot down Father Rouvière when the latter was in flight, some 150 yards away.

Since I have retraced the story of the murder, there is no point here in giving a detailed account of the examinations and pleadings. There is only one observation to be made, and that is in connection with the alleged maltreatment of the criminals, who had had to harness themselves to the dogsled. Everything indicates that they volunteered to do this in order to conceal their intention. That the priests ever struck the Eskimos on the head is improbable. As for the priest's carbine as evidence of homicidal intent, it is a general practice for all traveling in the North, whether Indians, Eskimos, half-breeds or whites, to

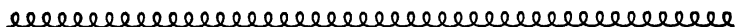
carry firearms when there is danger of running out of food on a journey. Moreover, the weapon is normally carried loaded so as to be handy the moment any game appears. I have seen this done over and over again by my Caribou Eaters.

The judge, in the course of his summing up, remarked: "There is no evidence that Father Rouvière ever threatened the Eskimos, which destroys the case for self-defense." In spite of this, and after only an hour's deliberation, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty.

The trial at Edmonton acquitted Sinnisiak of the murder of Father Rouvière, but there was still the second head of the indictment, the murder of Father Le Roux. This time the trial took place at Calgary, and the verdict of the jury was as follows: "We find the prisoners Sinnisiak and Uluksak guilty of murder, with the strongest possible recommendation to mercy that the jury can make."

So the death penalty was not imposed. I may say that, before the opening of the trial, I had myself made an appeal for clemency.

24: *Before the 1918 Armistice*



IN 1917 we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival on August 18, 1867, of the Grey Sisters at Providence mission. The founders were Sister Lapointe, superior, Sister Brunelle, Sister Michon, Sister Saint-Michel, Sister War, and a Franciscan tertiary, Marie-Domithilde Letendre.

These pioneers of charity were the first white women to brave the fearsome and little-known rapids of the Athabasca River. Their sole ambition was to devote their lives to the education of orphans and the care of the unfortunate in our northern territories. In those days, fish and game were almost the only food, and the only light was that provided by burning elk and caribou grease or fish oil.

"Isn't it tempting God?" the future Bishop Grouard had objected, when he learned of their impending arrival. "Will they stand up to these awful winters, without bread, with nothing at all? We men can manage, by killing a hare or a muskrat . . . but what will the Sisters do? Even explorers, when they have been well provisioned by their governments, have been reduced to eating their dogs, or even their shoes."

However, they came, and they stuck it out. For half a century they never received a single cent from the vicariate. All their community ever asked for was lodging, food and spiritual care.

During this same year, 1917, I embarked on the *Rochambeau* for Europe, and had as a fellow-passenger on board M. André Tardieu, the French High Commissioner in the United States. We had several alarms on the voyage, and a daily boat drill

was compulsory. Such was the general state of alertness that plenty of people, instead of sleeping in their cabins, preferred to spend the night in their lifebelts, reclining in chairs on deck.

In Rome, I had the privilege of seeing Pope Benedict XV, Cardinal de Lai, and various other high ecclesiastics. Later, on September 8, there appeared the letter *Commisso divinitus*, addressed to the archbishops and bishops of Canada. From Rome I went for a short stay in France after which I re-embarked on the *Rochambeau* toward the end of July, 1918.

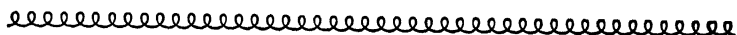
Before leaving France I had a letter from our procurator telling me of a disaster our missions had sustained from a flood. On reaching McMurray, we could easily gauge the extent of the havoc. The breakup had taken place at the usual time, but three miles below the post a vast barrage had been formed by the heaped-up ice. The only outlet for the water was over the two banks. It inundated the flat ground where the village stood, and reached a depth of eight feet in the shed where the supplies for our missions were stored. The thrust of the ice was so strong that in spite of the tons of goods the building contained, it had shifted and was almost carried away. The fantastic accumulation of floating ice made the work of salvaging extremely difficult. Fathers Lefebvre and Fallaize, on arriving from Edmonton with the intention of embarking on one of the first boats, toiled painfully at the task for several days. The total loss amounted to something like \$12,000.

However, there was no lack of delight at my arrival at Fort Smith on August 22. The same joyful demonstrations occurred at each of our missions. I had the pleasure of traveling with Dr. MacDonald, medical superintendent of the Canadian North. He examined the patients in our hospital at Fort Simpson and, as was his custom, had his pockets well filled with variously colored pills, purgatives mostly, which he distributed carefully among all the invalids (real or imaginary) whom he happened to encounter. Our Indians, as he knew, considered these pills a cure for every disease.

I spent the feast of All Saints at the St. Isidore mission, where I presided over the celebrations. A few days later, however, while I was in my room, I suddenly lost consciousness. The nurse, Sister Saint-Firmin, warned by a half-breed, rushed to attend to me. My condition was serious—congestion of the brain. And with it such complete amnesia, that I had difficulty in finding words. The excellent care I received from the nurse and doctor soon had me right, and later in the same month I was able to preach a triduum to our nuns, and a retreat for the Children of Mary.

On December 15 there was a great surge of joy when, on the arrival of the mail, there were shouts of "Armistice! Armistice!" It was the end of the war that had raged since 1914. Next day the whole population of the fort, Indians and whites, Protestants and non-believers, assisted at the singing of a solemn *Te Deum*.

25: *The Renewal of the Eskimo Apostolate*



IN 1920 Father Frapsauce besought me to authorize the resumption of our apostolate among the Eskimos, which had been interrupted by the murder of Fathers Rouvière and Le Roux. In the course of the investigations which followed the tragedy, he had had a chance of seeing the Eskimos at close quarters.

"They are naturally cheerful people," he said. "You never find a gloomy one. The thing then is to be cheerful with them and to speak their language. Anyone who can do this, and has a natural gift for making a joke, will have nothing, I think, to fear from them. They are indefatigable workers—as far as I've been able to make out—and laugh at all their mishaps. But their morals are simply atrocious. They abandon all children born in the summer. They steal and lie and are dissolute. They don't seem to change wives too readily, but between friends they are ready to make temporary loans of them. However, there are some who are naturally straightforward, and never lie or steal in spite of the bad example of the majority. So there is a certain amount of good material there. Unfortunately they are all addicted to witchcraft. Captain Joe Bernard himself was nearly killed by Anautclik."

I yielded to Father Frapsauce's request, and so he went off, taking with him Brother Benoit Meyer, a sturdy, hard-working Dauphinois, and a skillful fisherman besides. I had promised to send him a companion, and the priest I chose was Father Pierre Fallaize, a native of Normandy with all the good qualities of that province. Jovial, patient and unruffled, he was a little

weak of sight and hearing, but he had good teeth, stomach and legs. He set out in company with an Eskimo convert.

After many wanderings they reached the so-called "Fish Lake" and old Fort Franklin. There they met Mr. Arden who told them he had seen Father Frapsauce in excellent health some fifteen miles away from his house. On October 18, with Mr. Boland, a friend of our mission, and Mr. Boland's family, they struck out across Bear Lake and on the following evening landed opposite the bay where Father Frapsauce did his fishing. He was not there, nor in the humble little hut that served him as a shelter. After waiting till the 25th, Father Fallaize and the young Eskimo went off in search of him.

"Five or six miles from the mission," wrote Father Fallaize, "we had just rounded a big bay when we came upon a sled trail, which might have started a day's march back or even more, and led straight in the direction of the broken ice. I at once suspected the worst. We continued on our way, hoping to arrive before nightfall, and were able to follow the sled trail all the way, except where the ice had broken. It led straight to poor Father Frapsauce's tent. There no longer could be any doubt. He must have set out the evening before, which we verified later when we examined the markers in his breviary. What a night I spent!

"Next day on reaching the scene of the accident we could observe nothing but the fact that in all directions the ice had been broken up into small pieces, which so far were not displaced.

"I returned the day after with Mr. Boland and Brother Meyer. This time we saw a small black object just protruding from the ice. Mr. Boland saw it first. He dared not venture on the ice, which was giving and cracking, but managed to get within some twenty feet of the object which he clearly recognized as a dog. He also saw something else on the ice, which might have been the back of another dog or a caribou hood. But he could go no further because the ice was not strong enough, and the water underneath it seemed much deeper. It was our hope

that the ice would become more solid; but instead it broke up still more that very day, and was carried far out into the lake.

"Father Frapsauce had apparently been walking ahead of his team and had stopped to test the ice; but the dogs must have come up to him and by their weight caused the ice to crack under him."

After the death of Father Frapsauce, Father Fallaize and Brother Meyer took over his work. On January 1, 1921, Father Fallaize wrote as follows from his mission of Our Lady of the Rosary:

"Monseigneur and dear Father: from this land without sun I send you our best wishes for a happy and holy year. Be sure they have suffered nothing from the icy climate. On the contrary, our hearts—which have to produce so much extra animal warmth to resist such extremes of temperature, and spiritual warmth to embrace in charity all the Eskimos we have to meet—cannot but entertain the warmest good wishes for our beloved Bishop and Father.

"I would have liked to offer you some flowers for New Year's Day, but they don't grow in 66° F. below zero! However, in this dry, cold corner of our Master's field, bedewed with the sweat and blood of our martyrs, the good seed has taken root, sprung up and begun to flower. I arrived just in time to gather and offer you these first Arctic blossoms . . .

"My Eskimo parish numbers at present six faithful, five of whom I baptized at Christmas. Before spring I hope to double the number; but then the fight must end, at any rate temporarily, for want of combatants. The Eskimos will be going back to the sea this year, all except twelve who will be away elsewhere.

"A family came to visit us three or four weeks ago. The mother wanted medicine for her little girl, aged eighteen months. I didn't think the poor thing would live, but I produced some medicine, and while I was administering it I prayed Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus not to let the child die unbaptized.

"Eight days later the father returned. He had cast over the child all the spells that were known to him, and known to those of his like who were present. Now he came to tell his brother that death was imminent.

"Your daughter is going to die,' " I told him bluntly. 'Would you like me to baptize her, so that she will go to heaven?'

"Yes,' he said promptly.

"That day, you may be sure, I bolted my dinner without ceremony, and covered the eight miles I had to travel with a light heart and nimble foot. I baptized the dying baby 'Thérèse.' It was my first Eskimo victory.

"Yesterday I saw the family again. The good God, it seems, decided to show that his own medicine was worth more than all the grimaces of the sorcerers. The little creature is now quite well!"

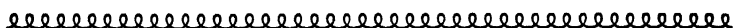
And our good Father had other consolations. At the Christmas festivities the Hare Indians came along to say their prayers.

"The house and chapel were full," he wrote. "Not that either is very big, or lends itself to ceremonies. If Bethlehem was bare and destitute, so was this. You may judge for yourself. The newly opened chapel is exactly eight feet by ten. It is connected with the house, but so far has no doors. Rough caribou skins are a substitute for flooring. The walls are just trunks of trees squared on two faces and caulked with a kind of mud. There are no ornaments but a statue of the Sacred Heart and one of Father Lacombe's picture catechisms, reproducing a summary of the Old and New Testaments. A little table, fixed to the wall, serves to hold my portable altar, and a chest beside it takes the place of a sacristy.

"Such is the little corner of the Arctic regions which Our Lord deigned to accept, on Christmas night, to commemorate the mystery of his coming into the world. There was no high Mass, nor much in the way of music; only a few hymns, sung in a barbarous tongue but with true sincerity. But, above all, Communion was received by all the adults present, with only one exception, a white man. Elsewhere the baby Jesus had more

spectacular receptions, but were they any more consoling to him? After the Mass of the day, three grownups and two little children were baptized. Such a consolation is enough to obliterate the memory of many sufferings and hardships."

26: *Manners and Customs of the Eskimos*



THE YEAR 1921 found me again in Europe following the example of my predecessors and visiting the families of my missionaries. After eight months' absence I returned to Fort Smith about the middle of June, with our procurator, Father Camille Lefebvre, and a new recruit, Father Trocellier. The hospital and school were both flourishing, as were all the other missions I visited.

At Providence a painful incident had occurred. In a fit of jealousy an Indian, the mission's servant, had killed his wife and child. The stipendiary magistrate Lucien Dubuc was sent from Edmonton, with the necessary escort, to try the case. It was the first court of justice ever to be held in Mackenzie, and the jury returned a unanimous verdict of guilty. The culprit then acknowledged his crime and pleaded for pardon. He was condemned to death and hanged at Fort Smith on November 1 of that year.

From Providence the *Lady Mackworth* carried me to Fort Simpson. The captain, Mr. Gardner, was a former pupil at the Indian school run by the Oblate Fathers at Mission City, British Columbia. He knew well our first missionaries in that district, among them Fathers Fouquet and de Coccola. We never tired of hearing him tell of the achievements of those wonderful pioneers, their readiness in the face of the most unforeseen and often the most complicated emergencies. All the earliest missionaries had frequent battles of wits with sorcerers and other shady customers.

According to Captain Gardner, the greatest difficulty our missionaries had to contend with was to persuade the natives to ac-

cept the indissolubility of marriage. After making vain attempts for many years, Father Fouquet at last had the consolation of blessing the union of an old couple who had always lived together in peace. "Now," he thought, "others will follow their example . . ." and he gave thanks to God. Great was the joy of the newly married pair to be able at last to receive the Holy Eucharist. Their gratitude to their Praying Man was too great to be expressed.

The devil was the only one displeased, and he resolved to take his revenge. The following spring, when the first of the flock began to trickle back, the same couple made haste to present themselves at the mission.

"Father," said the old man, "I have come in a hurry to see you. It's been a long winter, you know . . . long and hard. And that woman you gave me has become quite intolerable. I can't stay with her any longer. You must unmarry us at once."

"Yes, Father," the old woman echoed immediately, "unmarry us, do, and be quick about it."

Thereupon she launched into a whole string of complaints—and it was a very long string, too. At the final "unmarry us," Father Fouquet, who had had time to collect his thoughts, responded gravely: "Unmarry you, my poor children? I'll see what I can do, but it will be a long, hard job . . ."

"Not so hard," they chimed, "as going on living together. Quick, unmarry us!"

"Very well," said Father, "if you have made up your mind, go at once to the chapel, the house of prayer. I'll follow you."

He did so, merely pausing to arm himself with his breviary and a holy water sprinkler. The two old people knelt before the altar, while Father Fouquet, having said the prayers before Matins, made a big sign of the cross. Then taking the sprinkler he gave the old man's head a smart little rap with it, and did the same to the old woman's. After this he sat down and continued to say his Office. At the end of each psalm, he administered another rap with the sprinkler on both their heads. From time to time a hand stole instinctively to the spot that had been hit, but

by the time Father had finished saying his Office he had heard no comment and noticed no change in the old people's attitude.

"Wait here a few minutes," he told them, "don't go away. I am coming back to continue unmarrying you."

Having smoked a leisurely pipe, Father Fouquet returned, bringing with him a book to read. Just as he reached out to pick up the sprinkler, the old man caught his arm, and inquired anxiously:

"Is it still going to take a long time to unmarry us?"

"That depends on the hardness of your head and your wife's. Marriage, you see, can be dissolved only by the death of one or the other, so I shall have to go on till one or the other of you dies."

"Oh, if it's like that, Father, I think it would be better to stay as we are. What do you say, my old one?"

"Most surely, it's better," the old woman replied briskly. "Didn't I say so just now? It's better not to get unmarried."

They went away quite happy, and no Indian after this ever came to Father Fouquet to ask to be unmarried.

The second story opened with a sorcerer seated beside a little fire, surrounded by a crowd of admiring idlers. Father de Coccola arrived upon the scene and elbowed his way forward to see what was happening. Immediately the sorcerer threw him a challenge. Taking a piece of flaming wood from the fire, he popped it into his mouth. "Do that," he proudly challenged his visitor. All the savages present yelled their applause.

The Father waited coolly till the uproar had subsided, then addressed the sorcerer thus: "I would never lower myself to such child's play," he declared. "Look, do this, if you can." Whereupon, taking out his dentures, he gnashed them before the eyes of the dumbfounded sorcerer and his startled audience. Then he calmly put them back, but all the spectators had fled in panic, the sorcerer at their head.

In December, two dogsleds carried me to Fort Resolution, where there was a great gathering of Montagnais, Yellow Knives

and a few Dog Ribs for Christmas. There was a solemn pontifical midnight Mass, with sermons in French, English and Montagnais. Naturally the Montagnais sermon was the longest, for I had to take the opportunity, since I saw my Indians all too rarely, to explain the great mystery of the day, and also to warn them against playing cards for high stakes, a pastime introduced by some unscrupulous whites. To their great joy, I told them we would soon be building a bigger church, nearer the new site of the mission and school.

This was the third church we had decided to build this year, the other two being at Fort Simpson and Fort Rae. A fourth, over the workshop at Fort Smith, was to be opened the following summer. Where should we get all the funds? It was for St. Joseph to see to that. He had never failed us yet, so we might well feel confident.

Two days after Christmas, our good Brothers harnessed their dogs and off we went to Fort Rae. "Monseigneur arrived," according to the official account, "just as we were singing a *Te Deum* for the end of the year."

The Dog Ribs are a very interesting tribe; vigorous, energetic, excellent hunters and very clever at obtaining the highest prices for their furs. Fort Rae was and still is their provisioning center. They liked coming there to pray, to receive the sacraments and to meet one another for the feasts of Christmas, Easter and the return of spring. From there their hunting grounds fan out, for 100 to 250 miles, as far as Barren Land. As with the Caribou Eaters, the missionary spends part of his time going from camp to camp to visit them. They come themselves with their dog teams to fetch him, and they bring him home.

Before the coming of the missionaries, the Dog Ribs were the tribe most addicted to superstition and sorcery. The women were the chief victims, and probably suffered more than those of any other tribe. They were often treated with brutal cruelty, especially at the times they had to be secluded, and most of all after child-bearing, when they were turned out of the camp. Bishop Clut re-

lates how he once came upon a young mother alone in the forest, in a temperature of forty degrees below zero, with her baby trembling in her arms. Thanks to our missionaries these abominable superstitions have disappeared.

A disappointment awaited me at Fort Norman. Father Fallaize, who had arrived there in May, had been unable to wait for me, and had gone back to Bear Lake with his year's supplies. But he had left a letter for me, announcing his winter projects and making suggestions for the future. He added that all attempts to find the body of Father Frapsauce had so far been in vain. (It was not discovered till January 28, 1922.)

A report from Father Fallaize gives some idea of the living conditions of the Eskimos of Barren Land at that time.

"Life in this wilderness, in summer as well as winter, is an ordeal very few white men have attempted to face. Even the Indians, accustomed as they are to hardships, are reluctant to be exposed to it, but the Eskimos regard it as perfectly natural.

"The subsistence of a band of Eskimos on the move depends wholly on the rifle — till recently even on the bow — and it has to be provided by the caribou or wild reindeer. A few of these brutes have only to appear unwarily over the horizon, and the hunters immediately dump their baggage — which the women have then to add to their burdens — and set off without delay in relentless pursuit, a pursuit that sometimes lasts a very long time. If it is crowned with success, a camp is pitched in the vicinity. There they remain for a day or two, till all is consumed, or if there is more than they can eat, till the meat, cut up and dried in the sun, is light enough to be added to their baggage. Sometimes the hunters make a cache under a heap of stones, where the meat is sheltered from rain and wolves. This is done with an eye to future emergencies, for the Eskimos are the most provident of all primitive peoples. After this they set off to try their luck in another direction.

"Thus day succeeds day, and the Eskimos go on cheerfully, with no apparent cares, laughing all the time at nothing in par-

ticular. A passing bird, a whining dog, or a lucky shot is as amusing as a fall among the rocks or any other accident. 'They are strange people,' a gentleman living on Dease Bay remarked to me. 'Others, in their place, would begin to curse and swear; they simply laugh.'

"Another difficulty they solve quite well is the cooking of their food, for, in spite of their reputation, they eat comparatively little raw meat. However, if worst comes to worst, they can make whole meals of raw caribou meat or fish, especially in winter, when it is frozen. But in summer they always cook their food if possible. The only exceptions, normally, are the animal fats and marrow which they consume just as they are in quantities quite alarming to any civilized person.

"In summer when cooking their food they supplement wood or charcoal with two or three sorts of resinous plants, which grow close to the ground and can sometimes be found in abundance among the rocks. These have the advantage of burning when they are green . . . "

From the description given by Father Fallaize of the Eskimos' way of living, one may guess what his was like in those eighteen months' solitude without any companion of his own race.

"The worst days," he continues, "are the rainy ones, when the Eskimo can't emerge from his reindeer-skin tent and all his fuel is damp."

In winter seals are hunted on the ice. An Eskimo will often wait hours at the hole in the ice where his victim is expected to take a breather, for at this time seals are the daily sustenance of his family and dogs. When the fishing is over and the seals are more plentiful at sea, the Eskimo builds his snow house at a spot where he expects to find food. The missionary then prolongs his journeys accordingly, so as to visit the igloo villages on the frozen Arctic ocean.

Everyone has seen pictures of a caravan of big sleds, the dogs trotting on the ice, harnessed fanwise or two abreast, drawing Eskimos or whites, well wrapped up in their reindeer-skin clothes and big sealskin boots. On paper, the scene is so full of poetry

that some people feel regret at not being able to experience it for themselves. But with the thermometer down to 40 or 50 degrees below zero, or with a blinding snowstorm raging, the picture is less poetic; it is that of the Eskimo — or missionary — having to stop in the middle of the frozen ocean, battered by the winds, and hurriedly, and often entirely by himself, build an igloo with blocks of ice he hacks out with a knife. Still less poetic is the life of an Eskimo — and even worse, a missionary — living in this snowhouse for a week or more on end, and prevented from emerging by a dense, violent and persistent blizzard.

Barbarous customs have grown milder in the last twenty years, but at the time we are speaking of, murder, as well as lying and theft, was a crime to which the Eskimo was much addicted. If Father Fallaize managed to avoid the fate that befell his two predecessors, he nevertheless often found himself in very awkward situations.

One day a certain Huppo, a brother of the notorious sorcerer Kormik, made Father Fallaize sit beside him and after offering him a piece of dried meat, remarked suddenly, pointing his finger at the priest's heart:

"It wouldn't matter much, would it, if the Eskimo shot you there?"

"If it did," the Father commented later, "it wouldn't have done to tell him so."

Laughing as cheerfully as he could, he replied: "Not much!"

A moment later Huppo returned to the attack:

"Not much?" he inquired. Then added: "When you are gone I will come and take all you have in your house. I have done that once before, you know!"

He was obviously referring to the pillaging of the lodge occupied by the late Fathers Rouvière and Le Roux.

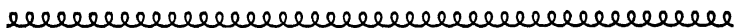
In September, I set off for Rome, where I requested various favors which Pope Pius XI and Cardinal Van Rossum, Prefect of Propaganda, most generously granted. From Rome I went to France, where a great trial was awaiting me. I had been over-

working, and this together with my travels and worries had completely shattered my nervous system. I confided to Father Guimet, the Oblate Provincial in the South of France, my intention of tendering my resignation.

"The best thing you can do," he told me, "is to ask the Holy See to name for you a temporary administrator with full powers. You can then take a complete rest for a year, and that ought to set you up."

It was good advice. I wrote to this effect to the superior general, Bishop Dontenwill. The reply came that Cardinal Van Rossum would relieve me of the responsibilities of my vicariate for a year.

27: *News from the Far North* *To Mackenzie via Ceylon*



ON OCTOBER 15, 1923, I wrote to the editor of the Lyons *Revue Apostolique*: "We have decided to found a mission at Aklavik among the Eskimos at the delta of the Mackenzie River. All we lack are priests to exercise the ministry, Sisters to conduct a hospital and school, Brothers to build and provide us with food, funds to buy what is absolutely necessary, and finally prayers to draw down blessings and so make our good intentions fruitful.

"However, we are setting our hand to the task with confidence. Our Brothers at Fort Resolution are sawing planks for us which we shall have to transport another thousand miles to the Arctic Ocean. What we stand in need of most is stone, and workmen who are true apostles.

"The devil is doing his utmost to put obstacles in our way and ruin all. It is a good sign! These Eskimo souls are truly predestined to enter the fold. The moment is at hand, and the hour of grace is about to strike. Three of our missionaries (Fathers Rouvière, Le Roux and Frapsauce) have already fallen in the breach; last winter a fourth was almost laid low — all alone on the mission. In the most advanced post of all, he is hundreds of miles away from his nearest neighbor. More and more adventurers make their way to those parts, lured thither by fur; will no one volunteer to take up the cross of those Oblates who have fallen on the field of the apostolate?

"I await with confidence the reply of the Sacred Heart."

Father Fallaize had gone down to Aklavik in 1923, after the thaw, and had cleared part of the ground. The following autumn,

when he had gone back to Bear Lake, Father Lecuyer, the missionary on the Arctic Red River, also went there. He stayed long enough to fell the wood for building and brought it to the site Father Fallaize had chosen.

In the spring, Brother William Beckschaefer set off alone by canoe from Fort Norman, armed with an axe, a saw and a hammer. By mid-July he had completed his house at Aklavik, a humble shanty twenty feet square. A few days later Father Alphonse Duport arrived on the scene. It was he who was administering the vicariate in my absence, and he now announced officially the founding of a mission for the Eskimos, with a school and a hospital, under the title and patronage of Mary Immaculate. Next, three Grey Sisters turned up unexpectedly, wishing to make the acquaintance of their new field of operations; and then Father Trocellier, who had been appointed the mission's director and who now took charge.

As I was still in very poor health in 1924, I spent four months in France at Divonne under the care of Dr. Vieux. When winter came on, I was indebted to Father Lemius for the hospitality of his fine house among the pines of the Landes, as well as, at the end of February of the following year, the offer of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Knowing that my vicariate was in good hands, I had no anxieties on that score, though I was naturally much interested in news from the Far North. From his mission of the Holy Rosary on Bear Lake, Father Fallaize wrote:

"I am remaining here to look after the house, in case last year's pillaging is attempted again. It was lucky I took the opportunity to build it, and make myself a bit more comfortable. For once, my Dog Ribs left me in the lurch. We had no saw. The whole job had to be done with the axe: walls, roof and flooring. Nothing very artistic, you may be sure. But it will do for now. The roof is covered with earth. . . . Also, I have a chapel and a tabernacle. The good God is inside it, but there is not even a lamp to watch in his presence; no ciborium, no monstrance; no

censer, no candles, no ornaments . . ." The poor hermit had only his little portable chapel. "It is twelve years old," he noted, "and it has given very hard service. It is now on its last legs."

He wrote again on January 5: "We had a congregation for the feasts of about sixty souls. For the first time in their lives they heard a harmonium, the gift of Father Robin of the Good Hope mission. The poor old squeeze-box is pretty well done for, thanks to two years' wear and tear on Great Bear Lake and violent jumps in temperature. However, it is nothing short of a marvel in the eyes of my flock.

"In a few days I start for Fort Norman, where I am going to collect my mail—and confess my sins. It is eighteen months since I have had that satisfaction. . . . On my return I hope to undertake another trip to the Arctic shore. I have some Eskimos in tow who want nothing better than to go to those parts, in March or April."

The projected journey took place. The caravan, consisting of Father Fallaize and two families of Catholic Eskimos, reached the Arctic Ocean at the mouth of the Coppermine River. There they found, camped all alone in an igloo, Pete Norbert, a Swede, one of the pioneers sent to the coast by the Hudson's Bay Company. No other white man knew the Arctic Ocean better. It was a providential meeting, for it supplied Father Fallaize with all the information he needed. Without wasting time the caravan pursued its way and visited three igloo villages built out at sea on the ice. The first, some ten miles out from Cape Locker, consisted of about twenty igloos, housing a population of approximately a hundred. Most of this band of Eskimos had never seen Father Fallaize before and received him very well.

The second camp of about 150 souls was situated well out from Cape Locker. Most of these Eskimos were constant visitors to Bear Lake, consequently they were well acquainted with Father Fallaize and very glad to see him. In one igloo there were no less than four notorious murderers, among them the two assassins of Fathers Rouvière and Le Roux.

The third village was situated in the neighborhood of Tree

River, to the east of the Coppermine. "Leaving my companions at the first village," wrote Father Fallaize, "I started off with a young Eskimo. Another who claimed to have killed two Indians the previous summer accompanied us with his wife and family. He wanted to explain the affair to the police.

"On Good Friday, we camped among a little collection of igloos on the ice some twenty miles from Tree River. Next day, in spite of a raging blizzard, my young friend and I reached the Tree River where there is a trading post belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company, and also a police post. There I met three whites, who welcomed me with typical northern hospitality.

"I remained there for Easter Sunday and Monday. I had not a single Catholic with me. It was a depressing business celebrating so great a feast in such complete isolation. To crown it all, we had, those two days, what I think was the worst snowstorm I have ever seen."

On returning to the first village, he learned that the seals were becoming rare at this spot and the hunters were on the point of dispersing. After renewing his stock of seal meat and oil for himself and his dogs, he set off toward his house at Dease Bay, with the same Eskimos who had been his guides from Bear Lake to the Arctic.

He came to the conclusion that the mouth of the Coppermine was the best site for a central foundation in Coronation Gulf. "This was the point," he added, "that our poor Fathers Rouvière and Le Roux were making for. Father Frapsauce also visited and recommended it. Captain Klekenberg once offered us a house here, and it is here also that our Bear Lake Eskimos have often asked me to found a settlement. It is one of the chief points which the Eskimos pass in spring and autumn. In the winter they begin their seal fishing close by and stay till the seals become scarce."

The Coppermine, therefore, would be the focus of all our efforts to found, with God's aid, our first mission in real Eskimo territory.

After fresh treatment at Divonne, during the summer of 1925, I thought I was fit to pay another visit to my Indians, but

the doctor was against it, unless I made a detour to prolong my sea voyage.

"Go via Ceylon," Father Duchaussois suggested, and the doctor agreed.

A few weeks later, the distinguished benefactress to whom I already owed my pilgrimage to Palestine provided the means to take the cruise which called at the ports of Suez, Djibouti, Colombo, Singapore, Kobi and Vancouver. Father Edmond Planet accompanied me.

We started at the end of January, 1926, and were at Fort Smith in time for the twenty-fifth anniversary of my being consecrated bishop. At every mission my jubilee was celebrated as a family festivity in which Indians and métis alike took part. The following is the letter I had the honor to receive from Pope Pius XI:

PIUS XI, POPE

"Venerable Brother, Salutation and Apostolic Benediction. We have recently been reminded that in the month of July next you will be celebrating, God willing, the twenty-fifth anniversary of your episcopal consecration. This news has caused Us all the more pleasure in that We are well aware of the ability with which you are discharging your pastoral office and the zeal you show in propagating the Christian name.

"On this occasion, Venerable Brother, all who can appreciate your worth will be giving you testimony of their joy and pleasure, and We are very pleased to add to it a special assurance of Our good wishes in your regard. We see in you an evangelical worker most highly to be esteemed for the industry of your zeal and all the labors you have undertaken; a bishop, too, filled with the desire to save souls and procure the glory of God. When the Mackenzie vicariate was erected, the Apostolic See, in virtue of your merits, entrusted to you, first, the care of its governance; on your part, you have never failed to water with the dew of Christian teaching that distant part of the Lord's vineyard. And the works you have undertaken in the accomplishment of this most noble and holy task have certainly produced very abundant

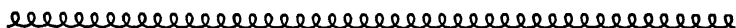
fruit. The proof lies in the fact that, at the present hour, in spite of the vast distances which have to be traversed and the difficulty of journeying, of all the inhabitants of the country there are now very few to whom the wisdom of the cross has not yet been carried. We have very good hopes that soon, with the aid of divine grace, your missionaries will overcome every kind of difficulty, reach the remotest regions of all, and successfully water them with the sweat of their endeavors. This common hope We earnestly pray that God may realize.

“Rejoice then, Venerable Brother, at the happy and joyful event now approaching. That these celebrations may bring to all your people a superabundance of happiness, We accord you the faculty of giving the papal benediction, with a plenary indulgence, obtainable, according to the formula customary in the Church, by all who are present on the occasion.

“Accept, then, the expression of Our best wishes. We add to this the apostolic benediction, which we give most affectionately in the Lord, to you, Venerable Brother, and to all entrusted to your care.

“Given in Rome, at St. Peter’s, the eighth day of May, in the year 1926, the fifth of Our Pontificate. PRUS XI, Pope.”

28: *Athabasca Rejoined to Mackenzie* *A Visitation of the Vicariate*



SINCE because of his age Bishop Grouard was no longer able to administer the two districts which made up his vicariate, a decree of the Holy See (March 15, 1927) rejoined Athabasca to the vicariate of Mackenzie. To commemorate the great services of the illustrious bishop, the name Grouard was given to the Athabasca district.

In July of that year I decided to visit all our missions as far north as Aklavik. I was accompanied by Father Fallaize, and together we lost our way for some time among the hundreds of channels which form the delta of the Mackenzie before we reached the port of Aklavik, where I was able to witness the magnificent work achieved by Father Trocellier.

While passing through Edmonton in September, I took the opportunity to ask my old friend, Captain Matheson, to build for us by spring a shallow draught boat, about forty feet long. Our numerous fresh undertakings involved more and more traveling, and I could no longer manage with any casual craft, because of the risk of losing precious time in our all too short summer. It had become necessary to regain complete freedom of movement. The *Rymer*, which I had got hold of after giving up our own transports and getting rid of our fine steamer, the *Sainte-Marie*, had many good qualities, but its engines were too cumbersome for a boat of such slight tonnage. I sold it after two years, and it passed into the hands of Captain Klekenberg. He tried it out on the Arctic Sea, and lost it in a storm which wrecked it on a point in Victoria Island, ever since called Point Rymer.

A problem now arose from the necessity of abandoning our

St. Bruno farm. Founded in the face of a thousand difficulties, it had prospered exceedingly, with its 140 head of cattle. Every year it provided our various missions with all the working animals and meat they needed, as well as milk and anything up to a ton and a half of butter. The site, near the salt pits, was ideal. The government had granted us all the land we needed. But we now faced serious troubles, if not complete disaster.

In 1908 the government had established, near Wainwright, in Alberta, a great buffalo park, to preserve the buffaloes from complete extinction. The venture having proved more successful than they expected, they decided to transfer seven thousand animals to the vast prairies which extend to the west and south of Fort Smith. The buffalo were to be carried by rail to McMurray, and the rest of the way by specially strong barges constructed for the purpose. It was no small job, but it was successfully completed by Mr. J. K. Cornwall, one of the pioneers of Peace River and the North.

These prairie buffaloes were not enclosed and made the most of their freedom. They were soon attracted by our own fine prairies and began to mingle with our herd. A triple danger ensued from this: first, that our animals might follow a herd of buffaloes and not return. Next, at the height of the winter cold the buffaloes might well be tempted to break down the enclosures round our haystacks. Where should we then get food for our animals? Finally the prairies served for pasturage, and even those reserved for hay might soon become exhausted.

Furthermore, we were also short of labor; while on the ground cleared around our schools and hospitals, farms were growing capable of supplying local needs. In these circumstances, therefore, we decided to abandon the farm and distribute the materials and animals where they could be better employed. The government, duly informed, reserved for us certain rights over our old prairies and the neighboring salt pits. It also granted us about 160 acres of land near Fort Smith.

In June, 1928, we put out on the Great Slave Lake in our new

boat, the *Immaculata*. Our passengers and crew consisted of Fathers Lefebvre, Fallaize and Vacher, Brother Kraut and the pilot, Alphonse Mandeville.

We had an excellent crossing, but found that influenza was making ravages at Fort Resolution, Fort Norman, and to some extent almost everywhere. Fort Norman was in the Hare Indian country. I went to see those there and found them ill but admirably resigned in their poor huts or tents. However, I could not help them without a doctor.

We continued our voyage as far as Fort Good Hope. Scenes of misery were to be seen there too. Father Antoine Binamé, the missionary at this post, described them.

"I was the first to come down with the disease. My Indians were not slow in following my example and in a few days everyone had it. A doctor who was passing through took me around as interpreter, which enabled me to gauge the extent of the epidemic. Everyone was stricken with it. The very night the devoted doctor left us, some began to die. Now I had to be doctor myself, and very soon, there being no one able-bodied left even among the whites, I became gravedigger as well.

"Several deaths occurred within a few hours. It was all that was needed to drive the Indians to panic. Without losing a moment, most of them, in spite of their fever, dragged themselves to their canoes and just drifted down stream. The more courageous went a little way up the Mackenzie, but they too were soon exhausted and after a struggle contrived to pitch their tents on the bank.

"In the general flight from death, one old squaw was left abandoned in the grass between her two dogs. I found her breathing her last. I succeeded in putting up a small tent to shelter her and then prepared her for death. There was no one to feed her. Brother Jean-Marie (Beaudet), though ill himself, found the strength to do some cooking for those left behind, and for a few days we were able to prolong the poor old woman's existence.

"In another family, the father and mother were both lying helpless, while their two children waited in vain to be fed. So we

had to turn cooks. The mother died a few days later, in appalling agony, but like a saint. Others could get no water to quench their devouring thirst. The infirm were squatting helpless in filth. One old man lay in agony at the door of his hut while another died abandoned by his daughters; I found him surrounded by a circle of greenish spittle. I administered the Sacraments and tried to relieve the sufferings caused by the burning fever. In the morning I counted the dead, rolled up the bodies in blankets, and with the aid of a handcart conveyed them to their last resting place. There I dug a trench, deepening it as required, and with the help of Brother Jean-Marie I lowered the bodies into it as they were, without coffins. After reading the burial prayers, I resumed work with the spade. . . . Often, canoes brought us still more bodies.

"Those who had left also needed our help. So with the factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, I set off in a motorboat to find them and amid more scenes of desolation I administered the sacraments freely and distributed the medicine I thought most effective.

"At last the deaths became rarer. The scourge had almost completed its ravages. In a few days I had buried fifteen of the best of my flock. My consolation is the thought that they died in grace."

At Aklavik we found the hospital filled with patients, and the whole staff, including Father Trocellier and the Sisters, was ill.

The return to Fort Smith was accomplished without accident. We were priding ourselves on the performance of our *Immaculata*, when on Great Slave Lake we were surprised by an alarming storm. In no time our boat was tossing about like a nutshell. Unable to keep on their feet, my companions thought it safer to lie on the deck. While I was clinging like grim death to the wheel, the seat on which I had been sitting was flung violently to the floor of the bridge. Our engineer, Brother Kraut, remained at my side to point out in the darkness the biggest waves to avoid. There was not a star in the sky. We made headway . . . but where were we to put in and tie up? Suddenly we saw

a light flashing intermittently a mile or two away, and we realized at once that it must be the lighthouse the government had installed in our absence on Great Slave Lake, at Fort Resolution itself. What a relief! The closer we approached the more sheltered we became, since we were now in the bay where our St. Joseph mission stood. We made port at one in the morning.

29: *On the Way to Coppermine* *How Letty Harbor Was Founded*

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HAVING DECIDED to make a foundation at Coppermine, the next question was transport on the Arctic Ocean for carrying building materials to this very remote spot. After exchanging a number of letters with the general offices of the Hudson's Bay Company at Winnipeg, I still had not received any satisfactory reply about costs. Their chief manager formally wrote me that this company had no post at the mouth of the Coppermine; therefore its boat would have to make a special voyage from Bernard Harbor — more than a hundred miles from Coppermine — and we should have to pay all the extra expense, as estimated by the ship's captain.

The position being so vague, I thought it wise, on the advice of Fathers Fallaize and Trocellier, to get in touch with Captain C. T. Pedersen, agent of the Northern Whaling and Trading Company at Oakland, California. I inquired whether he could buy and deliver, by July, all the building material and stores for the projected foundation; also whether he could rent or sell to us, to be taken over at Herschell Island, a schooner in which we could ourselves transport goods and personnel to Coppermine.

Captain Pedersen performed his company's regular service between Oakland on the Pacific and Herschell Island on the Arctic Ocean, via the Bering Strait. A very skilful sailor, and one of the most experienced in navigating through the polar ice, he had made the trip regularly for thirty years without a serious accident. He was very popular, and noted for his straightforwardness and generosity in every Eskimo community, from the Bering Strait to Herschell Island. His wife was his faithful companion on all his



voyages. A trained nurse, she devoted all her time and skill to various sufferers she met on these trips and generously supplied them with medicine.

My inquiries were warmly welcomed by Captain Pedersen, and I wired him a list of all the building material needed, as well as numerous other articles—food supplies, clothes, coal, etc.—which would enable our missionaries to lead a not too wretched existence in the isolation of the “dreaded lands.”

It was May, 1928, when I received from Mr. W. W. Cony, under secretary for Home Affairs at Ottawa, a letter in which he intimated that his department must be consulted before I could “contemplate any new field of operations for the establishment of any new mission.” I had no intention of being intimidated, so I replied by telegram, using diplomatic language, but saying what amounted to: “Mind your own business!” With that I set out for Herschell Island. But there awaited me, at Aklavik, a big and unpleasant surprise: evidently another attempt by the powers of darkness to bar my way to the Eskimos. The previous year I had made arrangements with a certain Jacobson, who had been a trapper for a number of years in the North, to pilot our boat across the Arctic Ocean. On our arrival at Aklavik, he was not there. He had evidently changed his mind; no one knew why. But by a great stroke of luck Karl Pedersen, another sea dog, volunteered. He had just been discharged from our hospital, where our devoted Grey Sisters had restored him to health. So he joined our company in the little schooner hired to transport us to Herschell Island. We were in good hands. Before entering the Barren Land and launching out into the open sea, he made us lay in a supply of wood and fresh water.

We had an excellent crossing from Aklavik to Herschell Island. Father Binamé, one of our party, has left us his impressions:

“Soon we had the Arctic Ocean before us. The sea was calm and since the sun was going to shine all night, our idea was to make all the speed we could. But a fog came up, and the first icebergs made their appearance. To avoid running upon these masses, our pilot cast anchor upon one of them. Then, when the fog cleared, we tacked as far as King Point harbor, which was

well supplied with driftwood. Among the pieces thrown up by the sea, we noticed the masts of a ship which had been sunk, quite near the harbor, evidently a long time ago.

"Clouds of mosquitoes were here. So we rested only a little while, and set out again. . . . A group of seals, seeing us, plunged back into the water and we had for a while some small whales which swam ahead of us.

"At last we were at Herschell, isle of flowers; it is also whalers' land, and many of them sleep in the cemetery there, as well as in the surrounding sea."

We had hardly disembarked in the little harbor of Herschell when the chief inspector of the Hudson's Bay Company, Mr. Hugh Conn, introduced himself, and after bidding me welcome in a somewhat preoccupied manner asked bluntly: "Is it true you have bought that schooner down there on the beach?"

"I couldn't say," I replied, "if it's that particular one or not. So long as I have one when I want to start, I shall be perfectly satisfied."

"Then who's bringing your stores?"

"Captain Pedersen. Who else?"

"What? I say, we are really sorry about this."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"Because there's a British company serving these parts, and you are patronizing an American firm."

"But my dear Mr. Conn," I answered, "don't you remember the correspondence we had last winter? I could read between the lines and see quite clearly that your company was not exactly anxious to help us get established at Coppermine."

I had, in fact, been looking about me in the course of the conversation, and just beside us, newly unloaded from the Hudson Bay Company's boat, the *Bay Chimo*, was a pile of building material for a trading post which the company was evidently intending to open at Coppermine. Every article was clearly labeled: H.B.C., COPPERMINE. More surprising still, alongside this material was another pile, every piece in which was marked very legibly: CHURCH OF ENGLAND, COPPERMINE.

Coppermine? In view of our past association I don't hold you personally responsible for this disingenuous behavior, the proof of which we can see from where we stand. But you can tell whomever it concerns that it would be as well not to try it any more."

Poor Mr. Conn, very crestfallen, had no idea what to say.

The higher officials of the Hudson's Bay Company, both in London and Winnipeg, had always treated us courteously. There had never been any difficulties in religious matters, and no interference on their part in the carrying out of our ministry. Certainly, from the very start of our missions in the Far North, there had been underlings who tried hard to hamper the way of the missionary, particularly in the day of Father Grollier when he was living on Great Slave Lake. But since that time, as Father Duchaussois records in his book *Amid Polar Ice*, the high administration had always shown itself deferential and even obliging. Consequently, as the result of my conversation with Mr. Conn, it was not long before I received a letter of apology from Mr. C. H. French, the manager in charge at Winnipeg. He was forced to admit that they had been anything but straightforward with us, and in a subsequent letter, dated January 16, 1929, he even went so far as to write the following:

"We are very sorry you have experienced these difficulties in doing business with us, and we beg to express our regret for what we may have done, and for what we might have done but failed to do, all of which has contributed to your losing confidence in us. We beg to assure you that we desire to be on the best business terms with the Catholic missions and to give you the best service in our power: our staff has received instructions to this effect."

Immediately after the arrival of Captain Pedersen, I completed the necessary arrangements for taking permanent possession of the *Nokatak* ("little brother"), our new schooner.

But now, all the devils of the Arctic Ocean set upon the *Nokatak* and our valiant missionaries. The latter have given details of their interesting but perilous voyage:

"I am writing to you," says Father Fallaize, "during my watch

on board the *Nokatak*. Our departure was delayed by bad weather, slow loading and some adjustments that had to be made on the vessel and its engine.

"We had taken a fairly heavy cargo on board. Apart from eight tons of coal, we were carrying building material for a house and hangar, and a year's supplies for three people. The whole came to about thirty-five tons.

"The crew consisted of six: the captain, a Swede, the only genuine sailor among the lot; the mechanic, an Englishman, so bad a sailor that he was seasick from the moment he embarked till he landed, and therefore perfectly useless to us; a Loucheux Indian, who was very useful indeed; and we three: Father Binamé, who looked after the motor, Brother Beckschaefer, who was our cook; and myself, who with the captain and the Indian attended to the wheel, sails and deck.

"Our navigation was not easy. The first day went fairly well and at intervals we could use the sails. Next day the wind turned against us. The motor was going all day, but we could only just hold our own in the open sea, and made no headway against the wind. Toward evening, things began to go wrong. New though it was, the steel cable of our steering gear broke and the wind drove us swiftly off our course. The captain assembled on deck all those who were not seasick (three of us) and we cast anchor amid the waves which drenched us very thoroughly. We replaced the steel cable with one of rope and hove to till the storm spent itself."

"Our situation, I can assure you, was far from reassuring," says Brother Beckschaefer who continues the story, "exposed as we were to all the winds, and threatened on all sides by big blocks of drifting ice which fortunately, however, ran aground before they reached us. Besides this, we soon saw that our vessel's leaks, so far from closing as we had hoped they would, were gaping wider, because of the terrific pressure of the waves, and we soon had to use the pump almost constantly.

"Even before leaving Herschell Island, we had noticed we were shipping water, but this seemed only normal after so long on dry

and. Moreover, Captain Pedersen had assured us that as the wood swelled the leaks would close. But it didn't work out that way. From now on, our chief concern was battling with the leaks. Tired of pumping by hand, we tried using the motor. This worked well for a time, but presently the engine became so hot that we had to stop it and were again at the mercy of wind and waves. Finally, we made a careful examination of the pump and discovered, beneath the cock of the suction pipe, a quantity of fine gravel which was preventing the water from passing through.

"As you see, we had a number of mishaps and our faith in the *Nokatak* was badly shaken."

The party decided to disembark at Letty Harbor and there pass the winter. A hangar was built to house the stores and a house-chapel would soon be ready to shelter its occupants. Meanwhile Fathers Fallaize and Binamé were to see to stocking the mission with firewood and fish for themselves and the dogs they had brought from Aklavik. All about was complete desert; not the tiniest tree or bush grew there, but in the neighboring bays there was an abundance of driftwood, the remains of boats and trees carried along by rivers and winds perhaps thousands of miles from their native soil.

Thanks to the cooperation of an Eskimo family who had a boat, there was soon a good stock of wood available, which would save our precious coal which had come from San Francisco. This latter, delivered at Herschell Island, had cost us \$45 a ton.

Fishing was very laborious. There was a lake, reputed to be well stocked with fish, twelve or fifteen miles away. To get there the dogs had to serve as baggage animals to carry nets, cartridges and provisions. And the two Fathers had to strap to their shoulders their blankets, carbines and portable altar.

The fish they caught was not enough, even to feed the dogs. A fresh attempt was made on another lake, then on a third. "This time," wrote Father Fallaize, "our good protector St. Joseph came to our aid. We had invoked him with all the greater fervor since it was a matter of keeping missionaries and dogs alive through the

long winter that was now fast approaching. And that day he sent to our nets twenty-two big red salmon."

While Father Binamé continued examining his nets, Father Fallaize hurried back, in the best of spirits, to deliver a few fish to the Brother who was the mission's cook. There he collected some more nets and set off again with his dogs for the same lake. That was Monday morning, the last day of September. On Thursday evening, the Brother was surprised when Father Binamé entered his hut alone and inquired for Father Fallaize.

"I was naturally astonished at such a question," Brother Beckschaefer reported. "I knew Father Fallaize had set out in the direction of the lake on Monday morning and thought he had got there long ago." It was obvious that Father Fallaize was lost.

A young Eskimo called Jacob, who had set off almost at the same time as Father Fallaize, now returned from his hunting and related that he had seen him taking the wrong direction and had shouted to him at the top of his voice. But there was a high wind blowing and Father Fallaize, a little hard of hearing, appeared to take no notice. The Eskimo then tried to overtake him, but the Father was too swift a walker.

Unfortunately it had snowed since the Father set out so it was impossible to follow his trail. However, with the aid of a few Eskimos, Father Binamé went off in search of him. Next morning, to Brother Beckschaefer's great joy, Father Fallaize turned up from a different direction altogether! He had taken a portage which led him to the middle of a large bay, opening out on the sea. There he realized he had gone astray. But as night was falling he thought it wise to camp where he was, between two chunks of driftwood, using his dogs as blankets. Next morning he saw a boat about two miles away, and making for this found two Eskimo families who were using the craft as their dwelling. Questions were fired at him from all sides. Who was he? Where did he come from? Where was he going? What did he want?

He explained that he was a Catholic priest; at this the Eskimos began questioning him about religion and for two days he taught

them the catechism. After this, his questioners showed him the way to Letty Harbor.

Thus the mission we had proposed to found at the mouth of the Coppermine came to be founded, by a providential accident, at Letty Harbor, in Darnley Bay, on the shores of the Arctic Ocean but about three hundred miles further west than was planned. Everything was to contribute to its success and prosperity.

# III



## *THE FLYING BISHOP*





## 30: *My First Flight*

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THE FIRST PLANE to fly over the northwest of Canada was a private one, belonging to the Imperial Oil Company. It landed at Fort Norman. It was not till July, 1927, that the first commercial plane reached us at Fort Smith. Piloted by Captain "Punch" Dickens, it had been chartered by Louis Romanet, the district superintendent of the Hudson's Bay Company, who wanted to be able to make rapid visits to his company's various posts, as far as Fort Simpson.

M. Romanet himself described a very unpleasant experience he had had, when flying over the rapids quite near Fort Smith. The engine had suddenly stopped, whereupon the plane, "like a camel in the desert when it proceeds to kneel for a rest, abruptly lowered its head and began descending. Meanwhile the rapids seemed to fly up to meet us with terrifying speed." The trouble was due to an empty gasoline tank. "Punch rose to the occasion, cool as a cucumber, turned on the other tank, and the eternity of suspense lasted only a few seconds. . . ."

There was as yet no regular service for the public, but Punch Dickens was providing the rudiments of one with his increasingly frequent flights. On each occasion his charming personality as well as his skill as a pilot brought him a number of customers.

Clearly the time had come for me to have my first experience. "In two days," so I wrote from Fort Smith on March 8, 1929, "I am flying to our St. Joseph's mission at Fort Resolution. Good Brother Berens is awaiting me there, snowshoes on feet and whip in hand, to drive me with his fine sled and swift huskies to St. Michael's mission at Fort Rae, where I am to celebrate Easter with Father Laperrière's brave Dog Ribs.

"I shall also fly back. For a month we have had an air service in operation between Fort McMurray and Fort Simpson. So why shouldn't I use it? To cover in an hour and a half a distance that would take four or five days with dogs is very tempting. Especially as it will be a great saving of money and energy.

"It will be very interesting, at a height of three thousand feet, to look down through the window of a comfortably heated cabin upon the rivers and lakes I have traversed so many times on snowshoes or by dogsled. It will also be interesting to salute in passing the fir woods where we used to be so glad to find shelter and where, after a frugal meal, shared with our dogs, over a fire that burned our faces and singed our furs but left our backs freezing, we hurriedly turned in, fully dressed, on a bed of fir twigs in some hole we had made for ourselves in the snow."

Punch Dickens's plane did not arrive till the 12th, and we set off the same day. It was quite an event at Fort Smith. "A splendid day," notes the chronicler. "Everyone — Fathers, Brothers and Sisters, even our helpers and some of our patients — turned out to see Monseigneur fly away to Resolution. Three sleds could be taken aboard quite easily; the rest were going by land." It was one of the pleasantest trips I have had, but too short; I had hardly time to say a little of the Office.

On April 8 I took the plane to Fort Smith, and then to Edmonton. The radio had already announced my arrival. Next day the papers were full of enthusiastic articles about "the Bishop of the Wind," now transformed into "the Flying Bishop." Without ever guessing, and certainly without deserving it, the first bishop of the North, perhaps of Canada, ever to travel by plane, had become a person of some importance, simply through flying for a few hours, seated comfortably in a Fokker, and in the care of an experienced and very confident pilot.

Though thoroughly satisfied with my experience, I returned from Edmonton to Fort Smith by water. And a very eventful voyage it was. At the outset it promised well; the water was calm, the weather perfect. But where the Athabasca River opens into the lake of the same name we were blocked by heaps of ice being driven in our direction by a stiff northeast wind.

On May 23 we were seen from Fort Chipewyan. Fred Fraser came out to us in a little skiff and promised to tell the mission to send their skiff to fetch us, but it turned out that the skiff was away at the fishing camp. However, when he was informed of our situation, my old friend Colin Fraser, Fred's father, had the answer at once.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, as I learned later, "we mustn't waste any time in fetching the Bishop. I'll put my man on the job, send my skiff and motor, and some rations as well in case it's not possible to return this evening. Everything will be ready in an hour."

An hour later, Horace, Mr. Fraser's grandson, set off with Brother Henri Sareault. I was delighted to see them. "Now," I said to myself, "I have still a good chance of getting to Fitzgerald in time for my appointment with Punch Dickens."

I therefore jumped into the skiff with my baggage. Among the passengers with us was a dentist from Edmonton. We had little trouble as far as Calves' Island, which lies opposite the fort, among the channels which empty the waters of the lake northward. But here we were frustrated! The ice had begun to break and the channel was filled with floating blocks of it. Night was coming on. We dared go no further. We had to wait on the island, where there was a good supply of driftwood with which we built a big fire and prepared a good supper, but when it came to passing the night we had not a single blanket among us. I myself had my musk-calf cloak, and a bed was made for me with a few branches of fir. On this I lay fully dressed, and after the Brother and Horace covered me with their parkas, I tried to sleep. Meanwhile my companions just shivered over the fire, which had the usual drawback of warming only one side at a time. In this way we spent the long, cold night.

Next day the breakup was at its height. It was impossible to venture among the floating masses of ice, which shot up wildly as they collided and clashed together. In the afternoon, however, it grew calm and soon an opening appeared. Without delay the skiff was hauled on to the drifting ice and the episcopal procession advanced slowly and painfully, for his Lordship inside the skiff

was forbidden to budge. Brother Sareault pulled, while Horace pushed, aided by the dentist, who had decided, after a little hesitation, to jump into the water and flounder along too, sometimes up to his waist, but like the other two always hanging on to the skiff in case they should get into deeper water. The cumbersome craft, bearing me and the "episcopal trunk" weighing about two hundred pounds, not to mention the gasoline engine, seemed to grow weightier as fatigue increased. This was the time, if ever there was one, to bring out that drop of cordial, reserved for just such emergencies, and rebuild strength and morale.

On we went, but soon, in spite of all our efforts, we were carried off by the stream. However, we were seen by three young fellows on the bank — Jack Wily, and Edward and William Flett — who without hesitation risked their lives to come to our rescue in a much lighter craft. They were able to take aboard with them our baggage and the motor, after which, with a final effort on our part, we arrived safe and sound on the shore.

At the end of June I made my way toward Coppermine. With me in a big canoe I had Father Alfred Gathy and M. Hornois, a carpenter. At Herschell Island we had to wait a fortnight for the *Bay Chimo*, the Hudson's Bay Company's icebreaker, and it was not till August 17 that we reached Letty Harbor. Here we took aboard Father Fallaize and Brother Berens.

On the 23rd we were at the mouth of the Coppermine River. There were a fair number of Eskimos on the shore, who recognized Father Fallaize and helped us cart our material. Two days later, on a Sunday, we had the pleasure of saying Mass under the roof of our wretched hut, now a veritable warehouse, filled with the year's provisions and many other things. The congregation on this occasion was reduced to the Nattits, the first Eskimo family to request and receive baptism. On September 1 we had a sung Mass, the first ever to be celebrated on the Arctic coast. On the following Sunday, the feast of Our Lady's Nativity, I had the pleasure of blessing my first Eskimo marriage.

I returned to Fort Smith on October 1 in a plane piloted by

Punch Dickens: a ten hours' flight. On the 25th of the same month I received the sad news of the death of Father Lecuyer, the missionary on the Arctic Red River, who had drowned just opposite his mission. It was a loss that gave me food for serious reflection. We had now reached the limit of our available strength. It was impossible to develop, or even hold our own, with a personnel so reduced as ours. If the Oblate Congregation, which I represented in my vicariate, could not supply us with the new workers, should I not in conscience notify the Holy See, and with the general administration's consent relinquish the task of evangelizing the Eskimos, so that this could be entrusted to some other community which had the necessary personnel at its disposal? It was a delicate question, not to be treated in writing.

In addition to this, I had received the estimate for building a schooner which would give us freedom of movement on the Arctic and enable us to supply our Eskimo missions. The net cost was so great, or so it appeared to me, that I did not think I could personally assume the responsibility of deciding. We had been given to understand so often that the money and personnel we were expending on a few thousand Indians and Eskimos, scattered over the vast solitudes of the Far North, could be much better employed in centers where the pagan population was more numerous.

With these considerations in mind I set out, on December 26, 1930, for the Eternal City.

31: *A Present from Pius XI* *Our Arctic Missions*



AT ROME the General Council of the Oblate promised me all the workers I needed. As for the authority to build the projected schooner, Cardinal Van Rossum, Prefect of Propaganda, suggested I speak about this to the Supreme Pontiff myself.

When I was received by His Holiness, I unrolled the map, which seemed to interest him greatly. He told me that the first book he had ever read in his youth was an account of the quest for the Northwest Passage. He had not only read but remembered almost all that had been written on the subject: the names of those who had led expeditions, and even the names of ships. I was astounded.

"The best vessel," he told me, "ever to sail in Arctic waters was the *Fram*. . . ."

Which gave me a very natural opening to broach the question of my schooner. Pius XI studied the plan in all its details, then asked to have a few points explained.

"What sort of an engine are you going to use?" he asked.

"We are miles away from any repair shop, Holy Father, so we shall have to use the most reliable, a diesel."

"Yes, they are the best, I know them well. And how much do you estimate the boat will cost you?"

I hesitated to reply directly, fearing His Holiness might be frightened by the cost.

"The price," I said guardedly, "is bound to be high because of the cost of transport through the Bering Strait. Then there are insurance, customs and all the rest. But we are counting, Holy Father, on the help of St. Joseph, our faithful procurator. All we

ask is authority to send the plans to the builders without delay, so that we can be sure of having the boat by next year."

"But tell me," he insisted, "how much is the boat going to come to?"

Not without trepidation, I admitted that it would not be under \$20,000. The Pope reflected a little, calculating, I expect, what this represented in lire or francs.

Then he raised his head and looked at me fixedly.

"But that's not too much."

I was too surprised to reflect before answering.

"Not," I smiled, "for anyone with money in his pocket; but it's a big sum for us to find."

"Yes, yes," he agreed, "that's true. But the Society for the Propagation of the Faith will help you. They have money for that. I will give instructions . . ."

Then he added, without much attention to my words of thanks:

"You will need dollars, won't you?"

"Lire or francs will do just as well—if there are enough of them."

"I understand . . . But one always loses on the exchange. I too want to do my part. You can count on \$10,000. Leave me your map, if you will; I like it."

Ten thousand dollars! I couldn't believe my ears. I stammered a few words of gratitude and withdrew . . . too overcome to think of asking a blessing.

That evening, realizing my omission, I wrote my apologies and entreated a blessing to extend to my missionaries, their families and their flocks. Next day a messenger from the Vatican brought the Pope's reply. He heartily granted me all the blessings I desired and authorized me to distribute them, without observing the ordinary ritual, in whatever form I liked. "His Holiness," the secretary added, "also wishes me to inform you that he has given instructions by cablegram to the Apostolic Delegate in Washington to send your procurator a check for \$10,000."

Before leaving Rome, I suggested to Cardinal Van Rossum that

our dean, Bishop Grouard, now ninety years of age, deserved of the Church, as a special distinction, the honorary title of Archbishop. A fortnight later, at Marseilles, I received the bulls naming him titular Archbishop of Aegina and informed him of the honor by cable. Here is his reply.

"Dear Bishop: Seeing the feast of the Archangel Gabriel approaching, I was about to write to wish you a happy feast when your telegram arrived. I know this somewhat useless honor was all your idea, and your doing. However, you meant well, so I forgive you and pray for you every day, and for the success of your undertakings. But now you must pray for me and ask God to grant me the grace of a happy death — that *will* be something useful . . .

"Yours very affectionately in Jesus and Mary Immaculate,
"† EMILE GROUARD, O.M.I."

According to the promise that had been made to me, I took back twelve new helpers from France. At Edmonton an unpleasant surprise awaited us: a telegram announcing that our hospital at Fort Simpson had just been destroyed by fire. I set off by air on June 6 and was overjoyed to learn, when I reached the scene, that there had been no loss of life. But the damage was considerable. All the reserves stored in our loft had been burned, some twenty beds, forty mattresses, all the Sisters' trunks and a year's supply of linen, medical stores, and other supplies.

After learning this I went by plane to Ottawa, where the Honorable Thomas G. Murphy, Minister of the Interior, granted me the sum of \$20,000 to remedy the disaster.

On June 25, again by plane, I went to Fond du Lac, where my Caribou Eaters attended the blessing of the new church. Then, accompanied by several of the Fathers, I embarked in our *Immaculata* for Aklavik, where I saw for myself how our work had progressed. After that we landed at Herschell Island, where we were turning the warehouse into a dwelling with an alcove for a chapel.

On August 3 we set sail on the *Bay Chimo*, among icebergs and icepacks. After a stop at Letty Harbor we at length reached

Coppermine, where we found Father Fallaize. The epidemic I have mentioned had been the occasion of his surpassing himself in devotion, and many of the Eskimos seemed to have more faith in him than in the doctor sent by the government. A paralytic, covered with sores, described him as his "mama."

We went by canoe as far as Bloody Falls. It was from here, in October, 1913, that Fathers Rouvière and Le Roux had set out to meet their fate. Now with us on board the *Bay Chimo* was an old half-breed Eskimo, Petsi Klekenberg. Father Duchaussois knew him well, having met him several times during the famous trial at Edmonton. He made repeated attempts to get some light on the mystery, but Petsi remained reticent. When pressed by Father Duchaussois, who pointed out how improbable it was that desire to get hold of a carbine should have been the only motive for the double murder, when the victims had won the esteem and affection of so many of the Eskimos, he at last replied with considerable animation: "You should know, Father, that among the Eskimos nothing so important ever happens *without the medicine men having something to do with it.*"

As a matter of fact, the notorious Kormik, recognized as the instigator of the crime, was reputed to be a sorcerer. This strengthened our conviction that our missionaries were killed out of hatred for our holy religion, whose teaching threatened to destroy the domination, hitherto undisputed, exercised by these men of darkness, the sorcerers. If only we could discover the formal proof, which would allow the Church to bestow the palm and halo of martyrs on our beloved departed!

On our return to the mission, Father Fallaize pointed out two fine young fellows, white men, engaged in erecting a monumental wireless aerial. They were brothers, Joseph and Edgar Arial, and had already distinguished themselves, at Hudson Strait and Chesterfield, by installing powerful radio stations.

"There," he said, "those are our best missionaries. It is their example that has succeeded in making catechumens of these pagans, and in getting them baptized. The agents of another cult all too successfully have flaunted the argument: 'The religion the Cath-

olic missionaries have been preaching to you is the religion of backward and degenerate peoples. No one has ever seen white men entering their churches; but they all come to ours.'"

These two Canadians had arrived at the beginning of summer, sent by the Admiralty to do the kind of work which would impress the Eskimos more than any other, and the first thing they did was to visit the Blessed Sacrament in our poor little chapel.

"We promised our mother," they explained, "wherever we were, to behave as good Catholics and always fulfill our duties. We have kept our word so far. With God's grace, we hope to go on doing so at Coppermine."

Every Sunday, it seems, they had been present at the principal Mass, to sing and receive Communion. They had also come to the evening service. Moreover, they had disdained a particular phase of Eskimo hospitality. We should thank God for providing such an example to these poor people, who are so little affected by all our preaching.

On September 3 we went southward again, taking the plane piloted by Spencer of the Dominion Explorer Company. We made a landing on the way at Hunter Bay on Great Bear Lake, where we had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of the brothers La Bine, Charles and Gilbert. The latter had just made a very thorough tour of inspection of some mining areas he had discovered the previous summer.

"They are very rich," he whispered.

"Gold?"

"No — better than that!"

What he was referring to was the now famous radium and uranium mine, the products of which, especially the atomic bomb, helped assure the victory of the Allies in the second World War.

I made a trip to Conklin, a post halfway from Lac la Biche. There were a good number of half-breeds there, who lived by trapping, fishing and cultivating the land. It was the first time they had received a bishop, and they welcomed us with great

demonstrations, even triumphal arches. The master of the post, a worthy fellow called Trindell, and his wife Maggy offered us kind and very generous hospitality.

There was a big hangar in which to gather our flock together and perform the ceremonies customary on a visit to a camp. Many received Communion, and I confirmed some children and old men. These poor folk told me all their troubles, saying how much they wanted a resident priest and a school. There was much good work to be done in this little village, but it would cost the missionary both devotion and self-sacrifice.

The first thing would be to build some sort of residence to serve as house and chapel. There was general agreement on a fine site for the purpose, but for the moment, this was all we could do. Our *métis* promised to square the lumber for building.

There was only one train a week on this line. On May 30, at the request of his friend Father Le Treste, Mr. Calahan, the manager of the line, put on a "speeder"—a kind of motor vehicle used by rail layers—to take us about thirty miles north to a station called Chard which was recognizable only by the figure "213" on a telegraph pole, an indication of the number of miles from Chard to Edmonton.

There we were met by the Rabouds, a splendid family that had emigrated from Switzerland. In the best vehicle they had, with two fine horses, they brought us over an extremely jolting road to a reservation of Montagnais Indians about eight miles further on. To this reservation had retired the descendents of old Louyson Janvier, who often put me up when I used to go up to Edmonton by dogsled. The Montagnais here were all good Catholics.

We stayed with M. Raboud, and all the time we were there the services were held in a room in his house. Not one of the Indians failed to be present; the communions were general, and there were even a few confirmations.

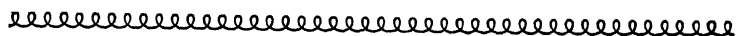
I took a plane back to Ottawa, where I had several matters to discuss with the government. At McMurray I received a wire to say that Bishop Grouard was seriously ill. I felt that filial piety re-

quired that I should visit him. It would probably be for the last time. I spent several days at his bedside, during which I had the privilege of admiring this saintly old man once again, his great spirit of faith, his abandonment to the Divine Will and his great charity. Then, with considerable emotion, I embraced him for the last time and we expressed the hope of meeting again in the house of our Father who is in Heaven . . .

On arriving at Fort Chipewyan a dreadful accident occurred. We touched down normally, with the engine off, but the snow was so slippery that the impetus carried us on too far, and one of the skids of the plane struck some barrels of gasoline on the runway, which were concealed by the snow that had fallen during the morning. A number of children were crouching behind them: four were killed outright and five were injured more or less seriously. The plane, after bumping — much as it does normally when landing on any uneven ice — pursued its sliding course on the snow, till an old log, driven to the edge of the lake by the wind, caused it to spin round and break a wing; the plane itself was pretty well done for.

On March 9, 1931, I learned of the death of Bishop Grouard, my venerated father in the priesthood and in the episcopate. His funeral took place with great ceremony, but I did not have the consolation of being present.

32: *Visit to the New Christian Communities · The Consecration of Bishop Fallaize*



EXPERIENCE had shown that our boat, the *Immaculata*, was unable to stand up to very heavy weather, so we sold it to Mr. Mardoff, the representative of the Northern Trader, although we had not yet received the schooner on which we placed so much hope. Renamed the *North Star*, the *Immaculata* performed much useful service until very recent years, on the rapids of Bear River, transporting supplies and material for the mining camps of Eldorado.

In exchange for the *Immaculata*, in addition to the agreed price, the company supplied us with material for a fifty-foot boat, built at Edmonton of Columbian yellow pine, and dismantled to facilitate transport. The reassembling of the parts would be a simple task for our master carpenter, M. Gratien Ouellette. All that would remain to be done would be to get hold of a motor powerful enough to tow a scow or barge if necessary.

On January 29 Father Jean-Louis Michel had written from Good Hope:

"I have just made a twenty-four-day journey to a colony of Indians whom no missionary has been able to visit except four times in twenty years. The trip was most interesting and instructive. I lived there in direct contact with the Indians, actually in their houses. They are goodhearted, but very backward, living entirely on boiled fish, and crunching their vermin, without qualms, by way of dessert. I had the happiness of administering the Sacraments to all of them, and giving First Communion to about a

dozen, varying in age from fifteen to fifty-two. I returned on January 22, the temperature being then 56° below zero. The nose and the tip of an ear were the only casualties . . .”

And what were our missionaries doing among their Eskimos, out there on the shores of the Arctic? Heroic in their labors, they had all kinds of difficulties to overcome: difficulties of language, in the first place. Father Fallaize, after spending several years among these Raw Meat Eaters, confessed to me humbly that he knew just enough of their language to know that he had learned almost nothing.

Then there was the laborious autumn fishing. At Coppermine it had been disastrous. “We have lost six nets out of seven,” wrote Father Fallaize on February 1, “fishing under the ice. We had to give up. A stream of wet snow, at least two feet thick, had passed under the ice, carrying off the nets we had set and gluing them to the ice in less than three hours.”

There was also constant illness; tuberculosis, meningitis and other diseases made dreadful ravages among the Eskimo population. “Death is constantly striking them down, and if they go on perishing at this rate there will be no one left in a few years. I visited a group of seventy-five Eskimos in Barren Land in 1924. In six years at least thirty-five of them were no more.”

Yet Father Fallaize, expecting nothing but ingratitude in return, had spent himself in ministering to them, with the help of Father Lucien Delalande, “a young missionary filled with good will and endowed with the finest qualities,” according to his superior. Their assistant, Brother Berens, combined the functions of cook, fisherman, trapper, dog driver and singer-in-chief in the worship of the Eternal.

But the worst difficulties encountered by our Coppermine missionaries were of the moral order. In their struggle for souls they had cunning and bitter antagonists to meet. “We have against us here,” wrote Father Fallaize, “a silent, vexatious and persistent opposition on the part of a handful of Protestants, freemasons and materialists, adherents of Darwinian theories who think they are in the vanguard of progress. Once or twice last year I had the

chance to drive them back into their entrenchments, but this year they are pursuing evasive tactics and avoid argument. The opposition is only more bitter. *Souls cost dear, and they have to be gained one by one.*"

Evidently, then, this dumb antagonism did not come directly from the Eskimos themselves, but from a few influential white men on the spot, who were never tired of spreading calumny upon calumny, suggesting to the Eskimos, for example, that it was the baptism administered by the Fathers that caused them to die. Thus our missionaries found themselves discredited with these dwellers in the polar regions, already predisposed against them by the fact that the Catholic religion was opposed to their pagan traditions and dissolute morals.

Yet for all that there were some conversions. From Christmas of 1929 to February, 1931, Father Fallaize administered twenty baptisms, some of which were *in articulo mortis*. "One hundred and fifty Eskimos," he wrote, "came to the post for Christmas; about 120 came to midnight Mass and partook of a little feast of frozen fish and rice. Our house could hold no more. I explained at length, and as clearly as I could, the why and wherefore of our coming, and of Our Saviour's coming too. Most of them, I think, went away well disposed toward us, or at any rate less ill disposed."

A pagan, a complete stranger to Father Fallaize, fell ill. Being old, and a burden on his family, he merely asked, in accordance with ancestral custom, to be put out of the way: he requested to be hanged. His relatives were quite agreeable, and had fixed the execution for sunrise next day.

Meanwhile some Christians told Father Fallaize who went to the dying man's tent and found he was, in fact, very ill. The rope — a strip of white bear skin — was already attached to the bar of the tent. With great difficulty Father Fallaize dissuaded the invalid from allowing himself to be hanged, giving him reasons for faith and offering to baptize him. This the dying man refused, but he consented not to be hanged.

Father Fallaize returned repeatedly in the course of the next

day, but with no more success. Then he was sent for during the night, and spoke to the old fellow of pardon, of the goodness of God, of Heaven and again the necessity of being baptized to get there. It was no good. The wretched man still refused; he was going to die. At sunrise Father Fallaize returned. This time, fully conscious, the old man at last accepted baptism, and died a quarter of an hour later.

"I was unable to give him Christian burial," wrote Father Fallaize. "The family wanted to expose the body on the Barren Land to be eaten by foxes. I tried to dissuade them, and they began to hesitate, but meanwhile the doctor came on the scene and began to argue against me. It was, he urged, extremely practical and at least as sanitary as burying in the ground. Confirmed in their own opinion, they carried out their design . . ."

The great event of the year 1931 was the consecration of Father Fallaize, whom the Pope had willingly assigned me as coadjutor with the right of succession. Rome left us free to choose the place for the ceremony, and none was more appropriate than Fort Resolution, scene of the opening of his missionary campaign.

We went ahead of him to Herschell Island, sailing in our newly-acquired schooner, *Our Lady of Lourdes*. How smart she looked, in her Marian colors of white and blue, and what admirable seaworthiness she displayed during the crossing to the Mackenzie delta. Alphonse Mandeville, the pilot, and the engineer, Brother Kraut, praised her incessantly, and we shared their pride. This was just the vessel we needed for the Arctic coast: admittedly she was a little too short, but if she had been any longer she never would have fitted between the masts of the *Paderan*, which had carried her from San Francisco via the Bering Strait. Her yellow pine hull was covered with hardwood, which would allow her to cut through ice without too many scratches.

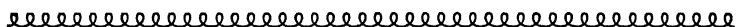
She was an ordinary schooner, 55 feet, 9 inches long, with a draught of 5 feet 4 inches and a capacity of 31 tons. Her 70 horsepower engine, a Fairbanks diesel, raised the anchors, unloaded

cargo and performed useful service on any number of occasions. Her two sails allowed us to use any wind that was at all favorable. The big one increased our speed, and with it we could do a good ten knots an hour. Without it we could do seven at the most. The little jib was principally of assistance in steering.

The consecration of Father Fallaize was fixed for September 13. Archbishop Forbes, of Ottawa, represented the bishops of eastern Canada; Archbishop O'Leary, of Edmonton, the missions of the West; Bishop Charlebois and Bishop Guy, the Indian missions.

The rites were carried out with cathedral perfection. At the Gospel, there was a sermon in English by the archbishop of Edmonton, and another in French by the archbishop of Ottawa. I myself spoke in Montagnais. Afterwards five hundred guests sat down to a banquet of elk, caribou, dried meat and pemican.

33: *Breynat Parish · A Trip to Poland*



COLONISTS had established themselves on a number of farms northwest of Lac la Biche, and I asked Father Le Treste, the missionary at McMurray, to pay them a visit. He discovered there a population of about four hundred: Ruthenians, Russian Orthodox, French Canadians and métis.

"You will be glad to hear," wrote Father Lacombe on July 25, 1932, "that there are the makings of a fine parish there. When we get to know all the Catholics, I would not be surprised if there were some sixty families, the majority of them Ukrainians. There are many young couples, well disposed to us and anxious to have a church. The Ukrainians told me that they would be satisfied if they were visited once a year by a priest who spoke their language. So far we have ten families of métis, 17 French Canadian and 15 Ukrainian."

In the spring of 1933 I went to see them myself. Mass was celebrated in the house of a half-breed and I was greatly impressed by the behavior of all present. The building of a church was obviously a matter of urgency; it would be the center of a very interesting district. Father Ubald Langlois, the provincial, negotiated with a Canadian, E. Primeau, who agreed to open a store close to the church. A little later, as the result of a petition, a little cheese dairy was established by M. Benjamin Deschênes. This proved disappointing after the first few months, and had to be given up, but a postoffice was installed, and this, at the request of priest and inhabitants, was given the name of "Breynat." I later applied to the Honorable J. A. Cardin to have a shortwave radio station there, but the war prevented him from complying

with my request. Today we have a flourishing parish at Breynat.

That great apostle to the Eskimos, Bishop Arsène Turquetil, having been named titular bishop of Ptolemais and vicar apostolic of Hudson Bay, asked me to be his co-consecrator, along with Bishop Charlebois. The consecrator was to be Bishop Gauthier, archbishop-administrator of Montreal (February 23, 1932).

I accepted with all the greater pleasure in that Bishop Rodrigue Villeneuve, the future Cardinal — an Oblate himself — and later promoted from the see of Gravelbourg to the archbishopric of Quebec, was to be inducted into his new cathedral the day after the consecration of Bishop Turquetil. There were two brilliant ceremonies.

I had promised my Fond du Lac missionaries to spend Easter with them. I made the journey by dogsled, to remind me of the old days. Here was Grosse Ile, where I had my first attack of diphtheria. Further on I came to notorious Rock Point, where, unable to proceed further, I once took refuge for three whole days from a raging blizzard, while the more active Indians braved the storm to announce to Bishop Grouard that I was lost and frozen on the lake.

All along the way I saw places among the cypresses and firs where I had spent many a night in the open. There were more trappers' houses than there used to be, and we could have enjoyed their willing hospitality, but I preferred to camp out in the middle of the forest, with my dogs about me and a big fire. We rounded Caribou Point, where once I had been so relieved to find a good Indian family to dress my frostbitten toe with warm water and a bit of hare skin.

We reached Fond du Lac on Wednesday evening in Holy Week. I officiated at all the ceremonies and preached to our good Caribou Eaters. On Good Friday we had the stations of the cross in the new church, and on Easter Sunday a pontifical high Mass.

On Monday it was time to go and I was still traveling when to

my great surprise I learned that the French government had made me a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor. At St. Albert on August 1, M. Paul Suzor, the French consul at Vancouver, pinned the cross to my soutane. After this I was summoned to Rome for the election of an Oblate superior general to succeed the late Bishop Dontenwill. The chapter chose Father Théodore Labouré, provincial of Texas.

Pius XI was gracious and friendly as always, and inquired about our little vessel, *Our Lady of Lourdes*, to the buying of which he had so generously contributed.

The Oblate provincial in Poland had promised me a good lay brother if I was willing to look round the houses in his province where they were trained. I therefore made my way to Poland, via Belgium, Holland and Germany. A wire had been dispatched announcing my arrival at Poznan at midnight so I was surprised that no one met the train. Bag in hand, I walked around looking through the waiting rooms and the station platforms. But there was no one at all. Luckily I had made a note of our Fathers' address, *14, ul. Ostatnia*, which I showed to the last available cabby, who seeing I was a stranger had made bold to accost me. After a moment's hesitation, he signed to me to follow. Taking my baggage, he led me to his cab. In French, then in English, I tried in vain to discover how far I had to go. The fellow just shook his head, flicked his whip, and the horse trotted on at a steady pace.

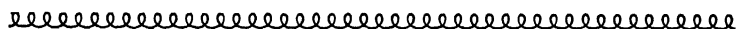
Presently we emerged from the town and were passing through open country in complete darkness. Where were we going? I began to be slightly uneasy. Was I about to be kidnaped? The appearance of my cabby, in the dark, was by no means reassuring. Suddenly he pulled up, jumped down without a word, and leaving me there on the highway, made off toward a barn. The minutes passed, and seemed terribly long. At length he reappeared and I tried to convey that it would be better if he returned and took me to a hotel. But he understood nothing of what I was saying, and made signs to the effect that it was not much further.

Presently we turned up a narrow lane. *Now* where were we going? At length we stopped before a big house, standing in complete isolation. There was no light, and no indication that it was a religious house. My driver rang the bell. I was still far from reassured. What sort of character, I wondered, would appear? At last a light went on, steps could be heard approaching, the door half opened and a pistol was leveled at us, held by a strong right arm, with shirtsleeve rolled up. A determined voice said in Polish what probably amounted to "Who goes there?" I hastened to reply, in a voice trembling with emotion, "Monseigneur Breynat!" The door was instantly flung wide open and I found myself in the presence of the procurator of the house, an Oblate like myself. "I was just getting ready," he stammered, "to receive you properly tomorrow." There had been a mistake in the transmission of my telegram.

The cabby was paid and sent away. Meanwhile the members of the community had leaped from their beds at the sound of our voices. The poor procurator did not know what to say or where to hide. The adventure is still talked of—and laughed over—even as far away as Canada, whither the brave Father came to devote himself to ministering to his fellow countrymen there. And his zeal is still tempered by the prudence he displayed on the occasion of my all too memorable reception.

I was pleased to observe that our young Polish province had developed at a speed which seemed almost miraculous, considering the slender resources it had at its disposal. I visited the preparatory seminary at Lubin, the novitiate at Markowice and the scholasticates at Krobia and Obra: there were two hundred and fifty juniors, forty-three novice scholastics, twenty-five novice or postulant lay brothers and eighty-one scholastics.

34: *An Eye Operation · Tour of the Southern Missions*



IT was now January, 1934. As I was generally run down through overwork, and as I had had a slight hemorrhage in the left eye, I consulted Dr. Wells of Edmonton. He considered an operation necessary. But I wished to postpone it for three or four weeks, as there was my correspondence to be put in order, and I had to go to Coppermine, where my missionaries among the Eskimos needed to see me urgently.

"It's only a matter of two thousand miles," I told the doctor.

"All right," he smiled, "but make the trip as quickly as you can."

I returned to Fort Smith on March 16 and took the plane again on the 22nd, making stops at Fort Resolution, Fort Rae, and Cameron Bay on Great Bear Lake. At each place there was great excitement on the part of my missionaries and their flocks.

At Coppermine, Fathers Trocellier and L'Helgouach were no less delighted to see me. But I could not stay long, as I had to be back at Edmonton by Holy Saturday, March 13.

It was a delicate operation, and Dr. Wells wanted to tie me down, to prevent any sudden movement on my part, but I persuaded him not to and he set to work at once. First there was a local anesthetic. After this I could easily follow the operation: the detachment and removal of a skin which was threatening to cover the whole eye; then the movement of the needle making two stitches to fix what remained of the folded-back membrane to the edge of the cornea. It was all over in fifteen minutes.

The doctor returned to see me on the third day and finding the state of the eye quite satisfactory, he decided to remove the

stitches at once. "Hold your eyelids wide open with your fingers," he told me, and in less than a minute the silk threads were removed with a little pair of scissors.

Having been instructed by the French government to obtain information concerning the mineral deposits discovered at Great Bear Lake, M. Paul Suzor, French consul at Vancouver, informed me that he would like to take the opportunity of visiting some of our missions.

The voyage from McMurray to Fort Chipewyan was made in the Hudson's Bay Company's vessel, the *Echo*. On arriving at the mouth of the Athabasca, we were held up there by a high wind, but our craft had been observed by the mission staff. Brothers Crenn and Sareault lost no time in coming to fetch us in a skiff. The radio had announced the arrival of our distinguished visitor and the Grey Sisters had immediately prepared a little reception, with a most graceful address of welcome, culminating in the singing of the *Marseillaise*. M. Suzor, moved to tears, thanked the children and their teachers, as well as the Oblate Fathers and Brothers.

Next morning we re-embarked on the *Echo* and after about twelve days' sailing put in at Fitzgerald. Then came sixteen miles of portage before we reached Fort Smith on June 18. Visits to the bishop's house, the hospital and the church were followed by a good meal of caribou meat, with more felicitations and thanks on the part of the consul. Then on the 19th, at ten in the evening, we embarked in our own boat, the *Guy*. With twenty-three passengers on board, including Mother Lusignan, the Grey Sisters' provincial, we arrived at Resolution in time for the first vespers of her silver jubilee. The feast was celebrated with great solemnity and gusto. At recreation there was a performance by the school children, in French and English, and they really surpassed themselves. In the customary address of congratulation to the Reverend Mother, a graceful compliment had been inserted to the consul himself, and also to France to whom we owed all our missionaries.

M. Suzor, in his reply, did not conceal his admiration for the work of the missionaries and their devotion, and he announced his intention of bringing it to the notice of those in high places.

"It is hard to decide," he declared, "to whom to award the palm: to the Fathers, the protective armament of every mission, to the Brothers and nuns, their indispensable fellow workers, or to their bishop."

Later our good friend backed up his words with a gracious gesture. He obtained the insignia of the officers of the Academy for the three senior Fathers of the vicariate: Fathers Le Treste, Dupire and Gourdon; also for Mother Lachance, superior of the orphanage, hospital and convent at Aklavik, in order to honor in her person all the missionary Grey Sisters throughout the North.

As M. Suzor had chartered a plane for his trip to Bear Lake, I was glad to accompany him as far as Fort Rae, where I had the pleasure of surprising Father Laperrière and his companions, and passing twenty-four hours with them.

On August 15 we ordained a new priest, a native of Chipewyan and a former pupil at our Holy Angels school at the Nativity mission.

On the 22nd, Bishop Fallaize gave me an account of a pilgrimage he had made to the cross erected at the scene of the martyrdom of Fathers Rouvière and Le Roux. The party consisted of himself, Fathers Dutilly, Binamé, L'Helgouach and Buliard, and the little Eskimo Peter Natit. A motorboat took them to the foot of Bloody Falls, where they had to climb a fairly high bank in their heavy sealskin boots, then venture forth into the trackless Barren Land. The frozen subsoil affected the surface, making it sticky, muddy and slippery. It was a stumbling march over "women's heads," creeping plants, lichen, moss and tundra, extending over almost the whole of the area.

Since no one knew the exact direction, it was necessary for members of the group to make wide detours, and scatter to right and left, in order to find the little ravine near which the murder

was committed. At last, in the afternoon, Father Binamé called triumphantly: "Here it is!" All hurried to the spot, and discovered the cross, about five feet high, already weatherbeaten and robbed of something of its whiteness by mudstains, but with the inscription still quite legible: *In Memory of The RR. Fathers ROUVIÈRE & LEROUX, O.M.I. killed by the Eskimos Nov. 1913, on a trip of Exploration For The Extension of The Gospel. R.I.P.* Behind it, near the left arm of the cross, were visible rents made by the claws of a powerful polar bear, no doubt the same animal which had leaned against the cross itself and knocked it down.

It was set up again and firmly stayed with rocks. Then the party knelt to recite the *De profundis* and a decade of the rosary for their martyred brothers in Christ.

The doctor had ordered me to take two or three months' rest by the sea, so I transplanted myself to a house of our Congregation at San Francisco, California. While there a letter arrived from the superior general, informing me that I had been nominated canonical visitor of all our Indian missions and schools, from Manitoba to British Columbia. However, the doctors were against my traveling immediately and the visit was postponed. Meanwhile Father Labouré, the superior general, decided to come and inspect our Mackenzie missions himself and asked me to accompany him.

We went to Fort Simpson, Aklavik and Fort Norman, thence by plane to Coppermine, and from there to Fort Rae where more than two hundred Dog Ribs welcomed us with a fusillade which at first rather alarmed the Very Reverend Father. Even the women, armed with muskets or carbines, expressed their delight. On the first Friday of the month, there was a general Communion and confirmation. On August 3 we arrived at Fort Smith, thus ending our tour of the Mackenzie missions, which had begun in the first days of June.

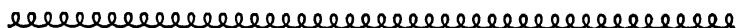
The visitation of the other vicariates and provinces was to be rather in the nature of an investigation into the general situation, particularly in regard to the progress of the schools. An inter-

ruption would be necessary to enable us to assist at the celebrations to be held to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of our scholasticate at Ottawa. The ceremonies were most imposing, and took place in the presence of His Eminence Cardinal Villeneuve, a former student, then professor and finally superior of the house.

The visitation was then resumed and covered the vicariates of Keewatin, Grouard and Prince Rupert, and the provinces of Manitoba, Alberta-Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Besides the many missions we visited on our trip, thirty-seven boarding schools underwent a very thorough inspection. When it was all over, we set off for Rome to report to the Sovereign Pontiff.

Pius XI, at our request, was graciously pleased to appoint Father Jean-Louis Coudert to be coadjutor and eventual successor to Bishop Emile Bunoz, vicar apostolic of Prince Rupert. The consecration of the new bishop took place on June 7, 1936, in the cathedral of St. Albert.

35: *A Private Air Service*



FLYING had so much simplified the visiting of our missions in the Canadian West and Northwest — more than five thousand miles had been covered — that I wanted to have a plane of our own, especially for our Arctic missions. Father Labouré advised me to approach Father Schulte, founder and president of the German organization known as *Miva* (*Missions Verkehrs Arbeitsgemeinschaft*), the object of which was to provide missionaries with modern means of transport.

I got in touch with Father Schulte, and it was agreed that the Mackenzie vicariate should contribute \$1000 to the cost and furnish the necessary supplies. The rest of the expenses would be borne by *Miva*.

Cardinal Villeneuve came to Cape Madeleine to bless the plane, which was christened the *Sancta Maria*. It was a 1919 model and bore the scars of its seventeen years' active service. I was sorry it was not equipped with modern instruments — so particularly necessary in the vast solitudes of the North — to reduce to a minimum the normal dangers attendant on flying. My chief apprehension concerned the engine which was kept cool while running by a simple car-type radiator.

My coadjutor, Bishop Fallaize, had set off from Edmonton in the *Our Lady of Lourdes*, with supplies for the missions of Coppermine, Cambridge Bay and Burnside. We suddenly learned that navigation had become dangerous because of great icepacks driven on shore by the storms. A Hudson's Bay Company's schooner, on this same run, had been crushed and sunk in the ice. How would our party fare?

We were expecting to have to rescue Bishop Fallaize and his team, stranded at Pierce Point on the Arctic sea. However, he arrived safely at Fort Resolution and I sent the *Sancta Maria* to fetch him to Fort Smith, where we spent a quiet week. This is the account of his adventures which he sent to the superior general:

"I think I can say that our voyage can stand comparison with those made a hundred years ago, and in almost the same area, by the explorers who went in search of Franklin.

"Everyone concerned, Fathers, Brothers and our Eskimo pilot, behaved with admirable devotion and self-sacrifice.

"We took thirty days to get from Tuktuksyahtuk to Coppermine. In the course of previous years' trips, the same vessel, the *Our Lady of Lourdes*, did it once, I think, in thirty-four hours. We had to open a course through three hundred miles of continuous ice and on several occasions the boat was nearly crushed. However, we were able to get Coppermine and Burnside supplied, and at the former I had the consolation of baptizing 13 converts, confirming 25, and blessing one marriage.

"The return journey was even worse, for the wind continued to blow from the northwest, bringing with it the big old icebergs floating to the west of Banks Island.

"Apart from the trouble we had with these floating mountains, we were also short of food. On the outward voyage we had been able to kill and eat some fifteen seals, but on the way back there were none, and nothing to relieve our standard diet of dried beans. When these were exhausted, we even had to eat an old seal, already rotten, which we had picked up in a snare we had left on the way out, and had intended to feed to the dogs.

"At last, on September 24, we had to abandon the *Our Lady of Lourdes* in the ice at Pierce Point. Actually the damage she had sustained was comparatively light, but our rations were too short to allow us to stop and repair her.

"We had 60 miles to go by land to Paulaktuk, at the mouth of the Hornaday River, whither our Letty Harbor mission had been transferred last year. An Eskimo family, whose boat, like ours,

was held prisoner in the ice, agreed, though they were also short of food and not of our faith, to keep for a time the four little children we were taking to the school at Aklavik, and to give us two young fellows with their dogs to transport our baggage and invalids.

"It had been impossible to supply Paulaktuk, but we were hoping to do well enough there, because last winter 1,500 big salmon and 30 seals had been put in cache for the dogs, and about ten caribous in an ice cave. Besides this, Father L'Helgouach had stayed behind to fish. On arriving, however, we were sadly disillusioned. Bears, particularly numerous that year, had completely destroyed our caches and those of all our neighbors, while Father L'Helgouach's catches of fish had been barely enough for our own needs and our dogs.

"However, there were still the caribou in the ice cave, and these saved our lives. We organized things in an endeavor to subsist. Brother Kraut made a big tent and a stove, while I prepared nets, and Fathers Binamé, L'Helgouach and Griffin went and set them in every lake they could get to in Barren Land.

"It was to a point twenty-five miles southeast of the mission, on the Hornaday River, that we transported our household goods (near the coal mine our Fathers found two years ago). The tent was pitched, and about it we built a big house of snow. I turned miner, to dig out coal, while Fathers Binamé, L'Helgouach and Griffin faced the rigors of the weather and toiled off to inspect the fishing nets, anywhere from 25 to 40 miles away to the west. They also fetched us flour and provisions from an abandoned post of the Hudson's Bay Company some 60 miles to the north.

"Several of our dogs, undernourished and daily overworked, died in harness. As for the toil and hardships so bravely and good-humoredly endured by our Fathers, only God can know and appreciate them.

"About November 10, they brought back from Pierce Point the four children we had left with the Eskimo family, also our radio equipment by means of which we learned that Bishop Breynat was going to dispatch a plane. After a long wait, which

disorganized our work and made the situation much harder for our dog drivers, it arrived at last on December 9, but the 'Arctic night' and bad weather kept it 10 days in the mission. It was not till the 19th that it could resume its flight, and even then it was hampered by poor visibility. It landed us right in the middle of Barren Land, and we spent an unpleasant night, flying out on the ice in the lake. Next day, Sunday, we started without tea or breakfast and arrived at Aklavik in the afternoon. I had brought with me the four children who were going to school there, also Brother Kraut, who is getting old and suffering from rheumatism, and Father L'Helgouach, whom they would have kept at Paulaktuk if there had been enough food. He was to teach catechism to the Eskimo school children, who would have numbered thirty this year if one had not died of typhoid. However, twenty-nine is not a bad figure. It is, in fact, the highest we have had so far at the Aklavik school. Fathers Binamé and Griffin have remained behind to minister to their flock and see to the recovering of the boat next spring. Poor Fathers! They are constantly in my thoughts, for theirs is the hardest lot. May Our Lady guard and keep them!

"The plane brought me back here, to Resolution, just in time for the midnight Mass . . ."

Here I may mention a few facts which will give a better idea of the difficulties surmounted by our pilot, Matt Berry, and his mechanic, M. R. Terpenning. Their flight will have an enduring place in the history of aviation, for it was the first time a plane had ever ventured into those parts.

They left Aklavik on December 8, which was the first clear day they had had for a long time. But it must be remembered that it was only the clearness of a grayish dusk, because at this time of the year the sun never appears above the horizon. It was impossible to fly except between eleven in the morning and three in the afternoon. The distance they had to cover was four hundred miles—a mere four hours in normal conditions. The day after reaching our prisoners in the ice, they were successful in fetching a load of provisions from Letty Harbor, where there

was an abandoned post of the Hudson's Bay Company. The pilot then wanted to return immediately with the rescued party. He warmed up his engine six times before he could rise, but it was too dark to use his instruments and the plane was so unsteady that he thought it wiser to come down. It was not till the 19th that they could at last get away, arriving at Aklavik on the following day.

On January 9, 1937, I flew north in the *Sancta Maria* with the intention of visiting our missions at Hay River, Providence and Simpson, and ultimately Fort Liard. The best pilots of the two companies serving the North all advised us not to venture further than this.

At Resolution, Sister Lusignan, the Grey Sisters' provincial, took passage in the plane to Providence, where she was making her regular visitation, and from there we pursued our way, in grand weather, to Hay River, where the landing conditions were perfect. But now we met with a mishap. While the plane was sliding quite normally on the surface of the river, one of its skid-stays suddenly broke in two. Remembering that Father Schulte had told me he had brought with him a complete set of spares, I drafted a telegram to the Fairchild Company, who had charge of all the material sent from Germany by *Miva*, and asked them to fly us out a replacement immediately.

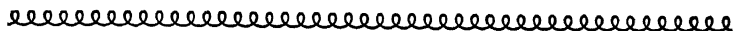
The nearest telegraph office was at Resolution, seventy-five miles from the Hay River, or two days by dogsled. Quickly the dogs were harnessed, and our pilot, Louis Bisson, took the message. It was ten days before he returned with the stay we needed, but — a new disappointment — it was longer than the other one. When it was fixed in position, the wings of our Junker were no longer horizontal. While one rose proudly in the air, the other dipped so steeply to the ground that any taking off would be highly dangerous, still more any landing.

What was to be done? Relying on the skill of our pilot, who thought he could take the risk, we decided to return south, merely stopping at Fort Smith to refuel. From Edmonton, in a

single flight, the plane was returned to its original point of departure, with a note to the effect that it could no longer safely perform the services expected of it.

Our contract with *Miva* provided that in any such circumstances they would take it back. A letter was dispatched at once to Father Schulte, expressing our regret at the unfortunate occurrence and our sincere thanks for his praiseworthy efforts to assist us.

36: *On the Arctic Coast*



WE COULD NOT lie down under this. We must get another plane, and without delay. We found the one we wanted at Winnipeg, and counting as always on St. Joseph, I did not hesitate to acquire it. It was a five-seater biplane, a Waco, wearing Our Lady's colors. We christened it, after its predecessor, the *Sancta Maria II*. In public, it was commonly called the *Blue Bird*. Fast and comfortable, it was equipped with all the latest improvements.

Starting on March 14 from Cooking Lake airport near Edmonton, we followed the course of the Mackenzie, visiting the missions of McMurray, Fitzgerald, Smith, Resolution, Hay River, and Simpson. Then, we made a sharp turn at Liard, to Norman, Good Hope, the Arctic Red River and Aklavik where we arrived on the eve of the feast of St. Joseph, the patron saint of Father Joseph Trocellier, founder and superior of the mission. We had covered more than 1,900 miles in eleven flying hours, interrupted only by our visits to the missions. Never, we were told, had the journey from Edmonton to Aklavik been accomplished so quickly. We had broken all records.

But we had still to visit the missions scattered along the Arctic coast. The weather was perfectly fine when we left Aklavik, but after two hours' flying, a strong wind caught us on the flank and drove us toward the sea; at the same time a fog came up which soon enveloped us completely. In these bare regions of the Barren Land, the slightest mist is enough to obscure the field of vision, blot out all shadows and every landmark; sky, earth and hills, sea, lakes and rivers, all merge into one vast expanse of white. We were obliged to fly at a mere seventy-five feet, so as

to pick up the coastline, our only indication of the direction to follow. From time to time, there loomed up masses of ice or low hills, which were hard to distinguish and our pilot showed extraordinary skill in adjusting his course to the contours of the ground, while keeping at approximately the same height.

We had just crossed the peninsula which shelters deeply indented Darnley Bay. The mission of Our Lady of Lourdes could not be very far away, and we would probably have sighted it, had it not been for the clouds. We circled over a wide area, but our search was in vain, so we decided to land and wait for clearer weather.

Providence now seemed to come to our aid. We had glimpsed a spade and ice chopper planted in the snow. This, we thought, must be the fishing lake of the mission which the Fathers at Aklavik had signaled before we left. If so, we were only about fifteen miles from it.

But in landing, the machine caught a block of ice hidden by the snow, and our rear skid was broken. This misadventure changed our plans. The damage would take some time to repair, for we lacked the necessary tools. Besides it was already four in the afternoon and we had to think about contriving some shelter for the night.

The pilot and his assistant, Brother Sareault, set to work immediately to immobilize the *Sancta Maria II*, otherwise it would have been completely at the mercy of the wind. This operation was perfectly simple. It consisted of hollowing out the ice in a few places to hold bars of iron we had brought with us in the plane. The ice was then pierced for water with which to fill these hollows. This immediately froze, firmly welding the bars to the whole mass of ice. Cables then anchored the machine to these various points.

While this was going on, I went to explore the neighborhood and find, if I could, a suitable camp site. I saw a little valley, not far off, which appeared to be well sheltered, so I set off in this direction.

I had been walking hardly ten minutes when before me in the snow I perceived an unusual object which I proceeded to examine with the end of my stick. I was not mistaken. Who can describe the joy of a traveler in polar regions when in the vast silent wilderness he comes upon the slightest trace or indication of life? No matter what the discovery, it sets his mind at rest and shows he has hit a good trail. I had just discovered a dog's excrement. How little we need to make us happy! I was happier still, thirty yards on, when I discovered another. Without the training of a detective, I could draw the conclusion that a sled had passed this way, and was probably the mission's. Better still, here was a rosary. Our missionaries were still faithful to the old tradition of telling their beads while toiling through the snow. No doubt this rosary had slipped from clumsy mittens.

And what was that board, over to my right, beside that heap of snow? There was not a twig of wood for miles. It could not have got there by itself. I drew nearer, and there, beneath the heap of snow, was an opening which I entered. Inside this shapeless igloo, as a protection against the eventual melting of the snow, a tent had been erected, separated, however, from the snow walls. What a fine shelter Providence had made ready for us! Nothing was lacking, not even light, for there in the corner were three or four candles.

I summoned my companions, who had finished their job. Food and blankets were at once brought inside the tent-igloo, and we made preparations for settling there for the night. While tea was being made, with the gasoline lamp used to warm up the engine of the plane, Bisson erected his radio aerial and tried to contact our people at Aklavik. It was Father Sylvio Lesage, at Fort Norman, who picked up the call, and the message describing our exact position. "Don't waste your batteries," he told us, "I'll see that Aklavik gets the message." He did and from there it was duly transmitted to Paulaktuk, at the prearranged time for exchanging communications. Now completely reassured, we took our frugal meal, then, in the "great white silence," wrapped in our blankets, we waited for sleep to penetrate our palace of snow.

Meanwhile, about eleven that night, Father Griffin had news of us by radio from Aklavik. In the morning, without waiting to breakfast, he set off to find us. He reached us just as the pilot and his assistant, with the aid of a hacksaw, a file and a hammer — the only tools they had — were in the act of repairing the broken skid. Great was the delight, on both sides, at meeting again in what is rightly called this "dreaded land."

We learned from Father Griffin that on the eve of our departure from Aklavik, Father Binamé had sent a warning to us by radio not to come that day on account of the bad weather. Thinking we had received the message, he had not expected us, and had set out with his dogs to collect some sacks of coal.

The pilot and his mate had at last succeeded in repairing the plane's skid and we were making ready to spend another night in the igloo, when up galloped a dogsled. It was Father Binamé. On returning to the mission in the afternoon, he had found a note from Father Griffin, giving news of where we were and explaining his own departure. Warmhearted as ever, the good Father thought we must have spent the night on the lake, without blankets or food or anything to keep us warm. Forgetting that he himself had eaten nothing since the morning, he reharnessed his dogs, piled into the sled a couple of huge white bearskins, a stove and a tin of gasoline, and a large pot of boiled beans, enough to last for a whole week, and off he went.

It was now nine in the evening. A happy evening indeed! And there was no little chaffing at the way our famished visitor dealt with the cakes and sweetmeats which our good Grey Sisters of Aklavik, with their usual kind of thoughtfulness, had packed in the plane to celebrate the feast of St. Gabriel.

It was not till the afternoon of the next day — Good Friday — that the weather cleared. Making a rapid flight, the *Sancta Maria II*, with Father Binamé on board with us, brought us safely to the mission, while Father Griffin took back the dogsled. We arrived just in time to make the stations of the cross together. There was not a single Eskimo with us.

Poor Fathers! They had spent their winter alone, on the Arctic

coast, without having received their yearly provisioning, and with no fuel but coal from a distant mine. No ministrations were possible; all their time was taken up in procuring food, their whole reserve of fish having been consumed by white bears. Six dogs had died of their labors. But somehow our missionaries had managed to see it through. Never have I seen a mission in such hard and tragic straits.

Just as we were starting off, our pilot, Bisson, came up with a sack of potatoes in his arms. We had intended them as a surprise for our hosts, but in our pleasure at seeing them again we had left them forgotten in the cockpit. They were now frozen as hard as stones. "Don't worry, Monseigneur," said Father Binamé, "we'll make good use of them. We'll thaw them out in cold water, a few at a time. But not too few either," he laughed, "at any rate for the first cooking."

The weather now being fine, we seized the opportunity of getting on with our journey. No pilot had ever before ventured into the region over which we were now flying. A tail wind had come up, which improved our speed, but with it, unfortunately, there came a fog which now and again reduced visibility. After flying for three hours we began to be somewhat anxious. Perhaps we had borne too much to the right. We switched left, and soon caught sight of a river, which we took at first to be the Coppermine. But the Coppermine had steeper banks and was wider. This must surely be a tributary. We decided to follow it, however, and presently we perceived a few fresh trails in the snow, then seven or eight tents: presumably an encampment of Eskimos. We landed to inquire the direction of Coppermine.

"You mean Burnside?" asked the Eskimos in quite intelligible English.

"No, Coppermine."

"Coppermine is over there, 250 miles to the west . . ."

We showed them our map and they pointed out our position. There was no doubt about it, we were on the Hood River, quite near the Burnside mission. The sun was already very low, so there was no time to be lost. To prevent further delay and guide us on

our way, we took an Eskimo with us, and a few minutes later we had the pleasure of surprising Fathers Delalande and Adam, as well as Brother Henri Tesnière.

Thus Providence was kind enough to let me sing the Easter Mass at Our Lady of Sion in the Arctic Circle, in the presence of a dozen Eskimos, the first converts of this year-old mission.

We feared, however, that the Coppermine Fathers must be getting anxious. The agent of the Hudson's Bay Company had informed us by radio that Father Buliard, returning from Victoria Land, had seen our plane out in Coronation Gulf flying over his dogsled and apparently going astray toward the interior of Barren Land. Therefore we started off that Easter evening to set their minds at rest. A couple of hours later we were receiving a warm welcome from Our Lady of Light at Coppermine. Next day we had a solemn Mass, baptisms and marriages. Fearing that the breakup might be early in the south of the vicariate, we waited only till evening to begin our return journey, which was completed via Fort Rae, Resolution, Smith, Goldfields, Fond du Lac, Chipewyan and McMurray.

The month of May took me to Rome again, where I related to His Holiness Pius XI all my various perambulations. I told him of our intention to consecrate to Christ the King the northernmost mission we had ever been able to establish in the vicariate. Very kindly he offered to present a chalice to the missionaries who were to devote themselves to founding it. A few days later I was brought a silver chalice bearing the inscription: *Pius XI, Christi Vicarius, Christi praeconibus* (Pius XI, Vicar of Christ, to the heralds of Christ).

I returned to Fort Smith on August 2 and on the 13th, accompanied by my vicar general, Father Alphonse Mansoz, I flew to Chesterfield, about eight hundred miles directly to the east.

In brilliant sunshine we flew over the long, wide bay — some two hundred miles — which led us to Fort Reliance, at the eastern extremity of Great Slave Lake. A police post had been established

there to detect and punish any rash hunter who might venture to penetrate the famous "musk ox sanctuary," the vast reserve where the remains of those ruminants are allowed to live and reproduce themselves in peace: a wise measure taken by the government to prevent the total extinction of the species.

We were able to get a glimpse of the big rapids in the river Lochort, a huge reservoir of "white coal," then we turned to fly over the "sanctuary," which goes right up to the borders of Barren Land. Here the ground is quite flat, covered with Arctic tundra and perfectly treeless. But the monotony of this vista was suddenly broken by the appearance of a magnificent rainbow, a complete circle into which we entered, and which accompanied us for several miles. It was an enthralling experience. I had never seen such a phenomenon before.

We reached the Thelon River, and as we flew along it there extended to our left, as far as the eye could see, a prairie all bedecked with many-colored wild flowers. The musk ox could certainly browse here at ease, but not a herd was in sight.

We arrived at Lake Aberdeen, a long, wide ribbon of water with numerous islets. A few miles further and we disembarked at Lake Baker. Here we merely took a little fuel aboard and in a few moments were at Chesterfield, having completed a trip that no one had ever undertaken before.

The Chesterfield mission was very well organized: not only were there a church and rectory, but a big hospital under the direction of the Grey Sisters; a fitting memorial to the self-sacrifice and perseverance of the mission's founder, Bishop Turquetil.

On August 16 Churchill celebrated the jubilee of its founding, and on the 21st there took place at Chesterfield the consecration of Bishop Armand Clabaut, coadjutor to Bishop Turquetil.

We should have returned to Mackenzie the way we had come. But since we had to pick up a new passenger on the way, it was necessary to go via Lake Caribou, Fond du Lac, Chipewyan and McMurray.

"It needed," as my vicar general wrote afterwards, "all the skill, courage and indomitable energy of our pilot, Louis Bisson,

to get the plane up off the still waters of the Churchill River which winds round the wharves of modern elevators before finding its way to the sea. The heat was stifling and there was not a breath of wind to help lift the plane, overloaded as it was with the weight of its fuel, four passengers and their baggage. One of the passengers, a pilot himself, had smiled at our preparations, and lighting a cigarette from a package of twenty, prophesied he would have smoked the lot before we were airborne. But he prophesied ill. His first cigarette had not turned to ash when the *Blue Bird* was already flying over Churchill village, bidding it a triumphant farewell, and making off north in the direction of Lake Caribou, the first stage of our journey. After a few minutes of flying, since we were now at a good height, we had to change our course. To the north the sky was dark with clouds, zigzagged with threatening flashes of lightning, while from the distance came the dull grumbling of thunder. To continue flying on our original course might well have ended in disaster. . . .

"The pilot therefore turned off southwest, keeping his machine at a safe distance from those black and dreadfully menacing clouds. After this it was pleasant flying, over verdant prairies sprinkled with lakes and interspersed with forests.

"After flying in a perfect calm for over 250 miles, the pilot informed us that we should reach the village in twenty minutes' time. Sure of his route, he folded up his map, and letting the great lakes on the left pursue their course southeast, he inclined his own southwest.

"A vast forest was still spread beneath our feet, denser than its neighbor which was beaded with miniature lakes like pearl buttons scattered on a dark green carpet. The same horizon opened out ahead, but streaked with little white clouds, speeding toward the south, and light as the filmy veils which the plane tore into shreds. We glided on our way without any apprehensions, already looking forward to surprising our missionary, engrossed with his flock and never expecting our arrival in that little lost corner of the world, Lake Caribou.

"But suddenly the plane as though scenting danger, began to show symptoms of nervousness. Very slightly the cockpit began to rock; a little gust of air passed swiftly under its wings, which leaning alternately right and left seemed to be seeking the trail of an invisible enemy.

"Then we felt an abrupt shock, so violent that we thought the plane had been smashed to pieces, and at the same moment, like a leaf swept away by an autumn wind, it seemed to be dashed against an impassable wall, bounding, plunging and throwing itself this way and that, as though engaged in a furious and deadly combat. But while the vast forest, the only witness to this combat, was rushing up toward us intent on gathering our mangled members, the plane, kept level by our pilot's arms of steel, righted itself with a final effort, was disengaged from the murderous grip of the hurricane, and continued once more, still tough and intact, clearing the air ahead of it. We had passed through the tail of a storm which was felt as far north as Caribou Lake.

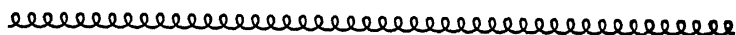
"There was a moment of dead silence, during which our thoughts still brooded on the shores of the other world, seen and lost sight of as if in a flash. Great emotions call for silence, if they are to resolve gently into serenity and calm. Ten minutes later the plane was alongside the grassy banks of the village, where many curious spectators ran to welcome us and help us land. Like one emerging from deep meditation, the pilot whispered in my ear: 'Father, a few seconds more and it would have been the high jump for us.'"

From Caribou Lake to Fond du Lac and McMurray the flight was uneventful, the weather sunny and calm. We did McMurray to Edmonton in a single stage, then set out on the northern trip. On the way we gave a distant salute to Fort Reliance, at the end of Great Slave Lake, then crossing Barren Land we went up Burnside River. As we had hoped, we had the great pleasure, on September 3, of finding the *Our Lady of Lourdes* there. Her crew were unloading the mission's supplies, Bishop Fallaize lending a hand quite as a matter of course.

I will spare the reader our comings and goings to the end of 1937. The following will give you some idea of our odysseys during the previous twelve months: 175 of the missionary personnel were transported by air, including bishops, Fathers, Brothers and Sisters; 44 patients were taken to the hospital; and the total amount of supplies transported equaled 29,400 pounds of fish, 25,900 pounds of meat (caribou, elk and buffalo), 800 pounds of grain and 3,300 pounds of general merchandise.

We registered 610 flying hours, covering a total of 103,763 miles for passengers alone. Of these figures, I can claim to my personal account 205 flying hours, with 28,000 as the total mileage.

37: The "Sancta Maria II" . Some Exciting Journeys



AFTER OVERWORKING as I had been, I was ordered by the doctor to take two months' rest in California. This was disturbed, however, by a telegram from Father Le Mer to the effect that there was an acute famine in the Coppermine area and immediate help was needed. Our pilot, Louis Bisson, flew off at once with several hundred pounds of dried meat.

On February 12, 1938, the radio station at Fort Smith received news of the disappearance of the *Santa Maria II*. According to the message, the plane had left La Bine camp on Great Bear Lake at midday on Thursday, with the sick on their way from Coppermine to Fort Rae. Since then, nothing had been heard of her.

The adventure is best told by Louis Bisson himself:

"Having left Coppermine on the morning of February 10, the plane had covered 300 miles without incident, when suddenly the engine cut out at a height of 3,000 feet. The ground below was woody, but luckily studded with numerous lakes. Obviously the only thing to do was to make for the largest of them and touch down without delay. So far so good. But what then? I was worried less for myself than my passengers, who were ill and badly clad. The thermometer registered 50° below zero. And our reserve of food and matches was limited. I knew that commercial planes often did the trip from Fort Rae to Great Bear Lake; but I also knew that it might be weeks before we were found. With these thoughts all jumbling one another in my head, I guided the plane down at a gentle angle and landed on Lake Fabre. I quickly examined the engine, and saw at once that the trouble

was internal. There was nothing to be done but wait for a plane to discover us.

"To set the minds of my passengers at rest, I tried to make them understand that the weather was too cold and that we could not get as far as Fort Rae that evening. With the aid of the Brother, I at once pitched a tent on the edge of the lake into which we moved the patients, now in a bad way and moaning to all the saints. As soon as we had a big fire going, I returned to the plane to radio for help but the cold had completely exhausted the batteries."

Night soon fell, and what a night it was! After vainly trying to sleep alongside the sick, Bisson bravely decided to attempt the impossible. He saw from his map that about a dozen miles to the south there was a little Indian village. He donned his snowshoes and went off to get help. With luck he would find a dog-sled to dispatch to Fort Rae, and from there he might ask for a plane to be sent. . . . It was a vain hope. All he found was a single hut, long since deserted.

In spite of the fatigue of his twenty-four-mile march, without food and in soft deep snow, Bisson set off in the morning without any clear idea of where he could expect to get help. Meanwhile Brother Jacques, who had remained with the invalids, heaped up branches of fir on the fire to attract attention with a dense column of smoke.

Suddenly, in the great white silence, the droning of an airplane was heard. Better still, it came down just beside their camp. They were saved. Bisson, who had also seen it, immediately retraced his steps, and was soon giving a hearty handshake to his old friend Achille Van Hee, a Belgian pilot in the Mackenzie Air Service.

Van Hee, before leaving Yellowknife, had learned that an accident had almost certainly overtaken Bisson's plane, since no news had been received of it. He immediately took off in his machine on the ordinary flying route, vowing he would do everything possible to find and rescue his friend. Therefore, from the very start, he and his mechanic kept a keen eye on lakes and forests. While over Lake Fabre and even before, he caught sight

of the column of smoke Brother Jacques had been keeping up, and was convinced he had the key to the mystery. Though he had no authority to do so, he landed without a moment's hesitation.

On February 13 he deposited Bisson and the Brother at Fort Smith. Along with them he had brought an old trapper who had both his legs frostbitten, a young baby whose whole back had been frostbitten while being carried in its mother's hood and another very sick Eskimo child.

In my report of November 26, 1934, I had written to Cardinal van Rossum, Prefect of the Propaganda:

"During the summer of 1934, gold mines were discovered on Great Slave Lake. Big companies have already taken possession of large stretches of auriferous ground. We expect a regular rush of gold seekers as soon as the snow thaws and shall follow developments in these regions very carefully."

Since then, I had stopped once at Yellowknife, the chief mining center in the region, but I had never been able to stay long enough to take stock of developments. I therefore thought I would send a commission of three Fathers to study the situation thoroughly on the spot. Father Ubald Langlois, the Alberta provincial, was good enough to lend me Father Alonso Gobeil, editor of the Edmonton newspaper, *La Survivance*. Our pro-procurator, Father Ehmann, was to accompany him, and Father Charles Gamache, of the Resolution mission, was to act as Indian interpreter.

Our *Blue Bird* was placed at their disposal. The trip lasted eight days, from the 7th to the 14th of July, the chief centers visited being Outpost Island, Yellowknife and Lake Gordon. On Sunday, Holy Mass was celebrated in each. This contact was much appreciated by the miners themselves and very encouraging to us.

The Yellowknife district proved to be much the most important. Father Gobeil sent in a very long and interesting report, noting among other facts: "The population of the Yellowknife district this year (1938) is probably between 500 and 525 souls. Of these 125 are Indians, settled at the mouth of the Yellowknife River."

The white population of all nationalities had its center in the

little town of Yellowknife, still in process of being built. There were already a postoffice and a radio station, an administrative and commercial center for the whole region, a police station, a restaurant and even a hotel, where for five dollars a day one could get a room with just a mattress. It was still important to take the good old sleeping-bag when going into these parts.

"We have chosen," added Father Gobeil, "in the middle of this new little town, a piece of land which might, as soon as is judged fitting, be the site of a small chapel and rectory. To sum up, I think we have here in this district a missionary field that promises to be quite fruitful, and it is important to keep in the closest touch with the Catholic population."

In June, I went to Quebec for the first national Eucharistic Congress. During the congress, a telegram informed me that the barge carrying supplies to the Eskimo missions had struck a rock and sunk. However, the goods were insured, and so the catastrophe was repaired, in so far as it could be.

On July 6 I boarded the plane near Edmonton with the Abbé Poncet, director of the Missionary Center at Geneva, and Father Alfred Gathy. "On the clear waters of the lake," wrote the Abbé Poncet, describing the scene for the *Courrier de Genève*, "the setting sun shed an extraordinary richness of brilliant colors. I had never seen so arresting a sight. The watery green sky, which gradually turned to flame, was of incomparable transparency. Certainly the North reminds a traveler from the Old World that light and color are not confined to the Bay of Naples. That very first evening I had a foretaste of the serene splendors of the Arctic."

But there was no breeze to help our plane become airborne. Too heavily loaded for flight, it had to return to the quayside.

Life in the North is a great school of patience. This first false start gave us warning of the fact.

The same disappointment awaited us next day. The weather was "hopelessly fine" — and hopelessly calm. There was no taking off. After waiting three hours, we decided to "unload" Father

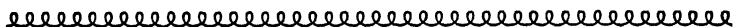
Gathy. He could go by train to Lac la Biche, where the plane would return to fetch him. To show that it had only been waiting for this, the little Waco gave a joyous bound and up she went into the great gold sky. We were off! It was good-by to the South; good-by to civilization.

At Fort McMurray we collected a new passenger, the Vicomte de Poncins, a sufficiently experienced explorer not to burden himself with unnecessary luggage. He had come to see me in Paris and asked if he could travel in my plane when on his trip to the North, which he was making to study the life of the Indians and Eskimos. I had willingly agreed, and he had now reached the "railhead," where it was arranged he should wait for me. Since Father Gathy could continue his journey by water, the Vicomte took his place and accompanied us as far as Coppermine. He spent a whole year among the Eskimos, living their life so as to get to know them better, and afterward wrote his interesting book *Kabloona*.

From Fort McMurray we flew directly to Fond du Lac, the home of my Caribou Eaters. When we were over William Point, about ninety miles from Fond du Lac, our attention was arrested by three great letters drawn in the sand: "S.O.S." Beside the shore an aircraft was moored. We had hardly touched down on the lake when a man emerged from a tent, waving his arms. Our pilot recognized him at once. It was Jimmy Warren, the millionaire airman, son of one of the biggest mine owners in Canada. He had run out of fuel, and there he had been for a good twelve hours, shivering in the fog and cold rain while he awaited assistance. He might have waited days, and even weeks, for he was off the usual course of the planes that served the Goldfields mines, which were his destination. We gladly gave him ten gallons of fuel, and even carried him, knee-deep in water, from one plane to another.

In due course we reached Fond du Lac, where I made my pastoral visitation.

38: *Death of Pius XI · 18,000* *Miles by Air*



BUSINESS SUMMONED ME to Rome, where I was given a paternal audience by Pius XI. It was the last time. On February 10, 1939, in France, I learned of his death. A sense of gratitude made it incumbent on me to pay my last respects. I returned to the Eternal City, where I had the signal privilege of attending his funeral and interment in the crypt of St. Peter's.

I was present also at the coronation of his successor, Pius XII, who was kind enough to grant me a twenty-minute audience. The moment I entered his office he rose, and without even permitting me to kiss his hand embraced me as a father would his child, saying what joy he felt in seeing me at his side. He had not, of course, the detailed knowledge of our missions possessed by his predecessor, but he assured me of the continuance of the same benevolent interest and the same paternal solicitude. He renewed all the encouragements Pius XI had given us, urging me to carry on bravely the program assigned to us, and bestowing on me the most abundant and affectionate blessings.

At the beginning of May, Bishop Ildebrando Antoniutti, Apostolic Delegate to Canada, expressed a wish to visit our Mackenzie missions.

We set off on July 5. The plane rose swiftly into the clear sky, forged ahead over the Rocky Mountains, and after five and a half hours in the air deposited us at Lejac, on the shores of Lake Fraser, where we were able to admire the fine Indian school. Next day I gave up my place to Bishop Emile Bunozy, the venerable Vicar Apostolic of the Yukon. In spite of his seventy-five years,

he had come to meet the Apostolic Delegate and conduct him round his missions in person.

The distinguished travelers went as far as Dawson, the world-famous gold town on the mouth of the Klondike River. This first missionary journey, from the 6th to the 12th of July, covered 3,500 miles, and in the course of it fifteen missions were visited, including the most remote and difficult of access.

Bishop Bunoz' coadjutor, Bishop Coudert, was making a pastoral visitation at Lake McLeod when the plane touched down there. Afterwards he wrote me his impressions in these words:

"I must admit it was not without some apprehension that I saw your *Sancta Maria* take off from Lake McLeod on her flight across these rugged mountains of ours, seeing that she had on board such distinguished guests as His Holiness' representative and Bishop Bunoz, our beloved and venerable Apostolic, who had only very recently recovered from an illness. Your doughty pilots, Louis and Jean Bisson, had never yet flown over the extreme north of Columbia or the Yukon, reputed to be a most dangerous area for flying. In all this vast area there is so far no radar and only a few radio stations, and your *Sancta Maria* had not even a transmitting set, to send out, if necessary, any signal of distress. In less than four days they visited all that great tract which extends, beyond the sources of the Peace, Liard, Skeena, Stikine, Fraser and Yukon, westward from the principal chain of the Rockies to the formidable coastal chain, with its glaciers and peaks crowned perpetually with snow. Many a flyer has mysteriously disappeared in those regions, surprised by sudden fog, crashing against mountainsides, hurled into terrifying gorges or making forced landings on lofty peaks, there to die of cold or starvation. It needed only the failure of their single engine, or an unexpected airpocket to suck them down. Most of the flying pioneers in these parts ended tragically, and in many cases their bodies were never found.

"But the guardian angels of our missions of the North must have borne this plane on their wings, so that the representative of Christ's Vicar upon earth might pass through all these dangers

unscathed. Whenever I hear of some fresh flying tragedy in these mountains, I immediately think of that daring flight of the Apostolic Delegate when aviation in the Northwest was still in its infancy, and I thank divine Providence for permitting this visit, which was so encouraging to our missionaries, and for bringing it to a happy conclusion in spite of all hazards."

Two days after our return to Edmonton, on July 14, we flew off again, with two new passengers on board, Fathers Serruot and Michel.

An hour later we reached the gorge of the Mackenzie and Heart Lake, the smallest and poorest mission in all the vicariate. It was a touching circumstance that the missionary who welcomed us was a native of these parts, Father Patrice Mercredi. We saw him on the beach, surrounded by his flock, men, women, even babes in arms who had come to meet the representative of the Pope. From the first to the last, they all performed the traditional ceremony of touching the hand.

In the little chapel-house, after the address of welcome, His Excellency the Delegate, in a very fine impromptu speech, urged his hearers always to preserve in their hearts three loves: love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, love of the Blessed Virgin and love of the Pope — three loves which would sweeten the sorrows of this poor vale of tears and lead us surely to eternal happiness. After this there was the solemn baptism by the Delegate of two half-breed children, Gabriel and Marie Anna.

Here, as in every other mission, the ceremony concluded with benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the distribution of souvenir medals and the apostolic blessing. The rite was modified from place to place, became ampler and more solemn, attained even the pomp of a pontifical Mass, especially in missions where we had a boarding school and a larger staff.

It is impossible to give details of each of our visits, but a word might be said of the one we paid to the Chipewyan Prairie. We arrived at suppertime, and were led through a wood to the house, with an unusual escort of people on foot or riding one behind the other in carts. There was an outdoor feast to celebrate

the seventy-ninth birthday of Father Le Treste, that ever-lively missionary who always reminded one of a homely papa surrounded by his children. Under the arbor, where our meal was served, we enjoyed the savory dishes provided by our host and his sparkling high spirits. The old man was renewing contact with civilization by discussing the foreign policy of Chamberlain, and even reciting a poem he had written on the *Sancta Maria*.

With stops here and there, and a ceremonial always governed by circumstances, we visited in similar fashion, between the 14th and the 30th of July, twenty-seven missions. On July 22 we flew over the Arctic Circle — without observing it. About two o'clock, the attention attracted by the throbbing of our engine and the apparition of the great *Blue Bird* emerging from the endless solitudes of the Barren Land brought Fathers Mer and Metayer to meet us, followed by Eskimos, across the deserted mud flats. We were at Coppermine.

From Coppermine, after a swift nonstop flight over the Arctic Ocean, we reached Minto Inlet in the solitude of Victoria Island. The prospect here is a lifeless one with no vegetation and no sign of even a hut; a few human beings, and that was all. It was one in the morning, and the sun was above the horizon. Father Coccola could not have been notified of our arrival, but he saw us, and little guessing the surprise brought him by this *Blue Bird* that he now saw for the first time, he jumped into his outboard motorboat and presented himself in a getup not at all unlike that favored by the Eskimos. I presented him to the Apostolic Delegate.

"The Apostolic Delegate!" he repeated, completely nonplused. "Who is that?" Everyone laughed at this.

The Father's provisional dwelling was a big tent of tough canvas, about 15 by 20 feet. It served as chapel, rectory, kitchen, bedroom and what have you. In one corner, Father drew back an Indian curtain, revealing a little altar, surmounted by a poor tabernacle arranged like an ammunition box. In the middle was a rich chalice, covered with a black veil. It was the chalice Pius XI had used at the feast of Corpus Christi and had afterward pre-

sented to this mission. So the Mass began, the Mass which the Sovereign Pontiff himself would have liked to celebrate at Minto Inlet. One felt the spirit of the late Pope hovering over these places now. His representative was here, and he fulfilled his promise with deep emotion, as we learn from the following lines which the Apostolic Delegate himself wrote in the mission's *Codex historicus*: "I am happy to have celebrated Holy Mass in the little chapel of Christ the King, with the chalice presented by Pius XI and used by himself. I offered the Holy Sacrifice for the repose of his soul, beseeching the Divine Redeemer to bless these beloved missionaries and the faithful of this little outpost of Christendom. With all my heart I offer this mission my warmest good wishes: *vivat, crescat, floreat, in bonum animarum et in aedificationem corporis Christi*. Signed: Ildebrando Antoniutti, Arch. Syn., Apostolic Delegate."

Because of a great white cloud, rising from water level skyward to we knew not what height — an arctic mirage that continued to follow us eastward — we had to stop for some hours on Read Island. Then, to be on the safe side, we returned to Coppermine to fill up with fuel. On July 25 we arrived at Paulaktuk. Father Binamé and Brother Kraut had gone off on the *Our Lady of Lourdes* to fetch their year's supplies. In the neighborhood of the Fathers' house there were just two families of Eskimos. Down at the end of the point, facing the sea, there rose the grotto which sheltered a statue of the Virgin of Massabielle with Bernadette kneeling at her feet. This was a gift from Bishop Gerlier of Lourdes.

After a macaroni supper, prepared by the Pope's representative himself, we went down, followed by our Eskimos, to pay homage to the Queen of the Arctic.

Leaving Paulaktuk, we soon had to make a forced landing because of the low temperature. We spent the night, packed like sardines, in the plane, but next day we were able to say our Masses at Stanton, in the chapel-house of Father Dehurtevent. Finally, after a hearty greeting to Father Franche in the solitude of Tuktukyaktuk, we arrived at Aklavik on July 25, at ten in the evening.

The most perilous stretch of the journey was now over. It had been a daring venture, the fourth great flight accomplished by our pilot Louis Bisson over the Arctic sea. The visitation of the Mackenzie missions ended with that of St. Anne's mission on the Hay River on July 30, after flying 5,200 miles in all, of which nearly 1,200 miles were over Barren Land and the Arctic Ocean.

In a single stage we reached Fort Vermilion, where Bishop Ubald Langlois, vicar apostolic of Grouard, came to meet us, and the Indian chief saluted the Apostolic Delegate as follows:

"You, the envoy of the Very Great Man of Prayer, have come from far away to see us. Even though we live at such a distance, as though hidden in a wood, and even though we may seem, like Cain of old, to flee the presence of the Holy Spirit, yet the Men of Prayer have sought us out. They are great hunters. For a long time they pursued us, as though hunting, before they could catch us in the lasso of their prayer. It is nearly twice a thousand winters since the birth of Jesus. At last the Men of Prayer have reached even us, thanks to the Great Spirit. You will tell the Very Great Man of Prayer that we venerate him most respectfully, love him with all our hearts, and thank him for having sent you here to see us."

Next came the missions of Whitefish, La Loche Portage, Ile-la-Crosse, Ox River, Detroit, Lake Claire and Chagana. After that, Beauval and its splendid school. From there, a flight of 330 miles brought us to St. Peter's mission, north of Lake Caribou. Then rain held us up for two days on the edge of a little lake. And we were without a tent. Again the Delegate revealed his *cordon bleu* talents. Night was spent in the cockpit of the plane among our valises and all the rest of the baggage. But it was better than sleeping in the pouring rain.

Le Pas, the headquarters of Bishop Lajeunesse, is a pleasant little town and we were given an impressive reception by the missionaries and a delegation of the local inhabitants. But time was getting on. It was now August 11 and Bishop Turquetil was expecting the Delegate to celebrate the feast of the Assumption with his Eskimos at Chesterfield. After this we inspected the

George and Old Counter and our task was then ended. Between July 5 and August 3 we had covered 18,000 miles and visited eighty-five missions.

The Apostolic Delegate recorded his impressions in the Quebec *Action Catholique*:

"Everywhere bishops, missionaries and faithful," he wrote "received me with touching signs of enthusiasm and gratitude. They understood the purpose of my visit and had a lively appreciation of the interest taken by the Holy See in the apostolic work they had accomplished with so much zeal and devotion.

"I had the pleasure of spending several unforgettable days in the cordial and hospitable atmosphere of the missions and shared entirely the missionaries' simple life. My journey was more than a visitation. It was also a pilgrimage of love and gratitude to the various abodes of these apostles, mostly unknown, who by their heroic sacrifices have deserved so well of the Church and civilization. Before beginning this pilgrimage I went to kneel at the tomb of saintly Bishop Grandin, in the historic mission of St. Albert.

"The day I arrived, in brilliant sunshine at one in the morning, at the poor little chapel of the mission of Christ the King, the northernmost of all the Mackenzie vicariate, I embraced the missionary there, devoting himself to souls in the solitude of polar ice, and said: *In terra deserta apparui tibi ut viderem virtutem tuam et gloriam tuam.* — 'I have come into this desert land to see your virtue and your glory.'

"In the mission of Christ the King, I had the deep consolation — the memory of which will be ever engraved on my heart — of celebrating Holy Mass with the chalice which Pius XI, the Pope of the Missions, had given Bishop Breynat, after using it himself for offering the Holy Sacrifice on the feast of Corpus Christi in 1937. The venerable Pontiff had expressed the desire that this chalice should be used to celebrate the holy mysteries at this particular mission for which he had always shown a special affection.

"I offered the Holy Sacrifice for the soul of the great Pontiff, praying that Our Lord would extend his kingdom to the extremities of the earth.

"I realized, in the course of my journey, how aptly Pius XI had described the part played by the Oblates when he called them 'specialists in the most difficult missions.' Pius XI himself, before my departure from Rome last September, spoke to me with lively emotion and very special interest of the missions of the Canadian Far North, saying that if it had been possible for him, in order to testify to his love for these missions, to visit some of the most difficult he would have chosen those of the Oblate Fathers in Canada.

"I told the Sovereign Pontiff that I would try to realize his paternal wish, whereupon the venerable old man blessed me with a smile of satisfaction.

"I am now completing my pilgrimage at Quebec. I am glad that circumstances have permitted me to end my travels in the mother-church of Canada, founded by saintly Bishop Laval. It was from here that these went forth, into every province of Canada, those first missionaries who proclaimed Christ *a mari usque ad mare et a flumine usque ad terminos orbis terrae*. Never more than today has that prophecy a happier application: 'from the river (the St. Lawrence) to the ends of the earth.' After paying homage to the daughter churches, I come now to pay homage to their venerable mother.

"It gives me all the greater pleasure to perform this tender duty in that the see of Quebec is today so worthily occupied by a member of that Oblate family which has charge of all the missions in the Far North, His Eminence Cardinal Villeneuve, the revered and beloved pastor of this illustrious diocese.

"Finally I desire to express my admiration and gratitude to my friend, Louis Bisson, who by his skill and devotion has made this journey so extremely agreeable.

"To the bishops, missionaries, Sisters and faithful, recently described by the Sovereign Pontiff in a moving telegram as 'distant in space but close to his paternal heart,' I renew once again the

Holy Father's blessing, assuring them that I shall never forget the consolations it has been mine to experience in the course of these short but well-filled days that I have spent among them."

On November 12, at Fort Smith, I was enjoying a little after-breakfast recreation with good Father Mansoz, the superior of the mission and my vicar general, when one of our brave métis, Leon Mercredi, knocked at the door. A little surprised at this morning visit, we began to chat about this and that, when suddenly turning to me, his face all smiles, he blurted out:

"Monseigneur, I have come to congratulate you!"

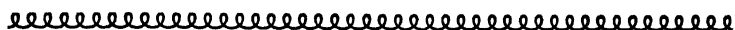
"Congratulate me? Why?"

"Haven't you been made an archbishop? I heard it on the radio last night, and again this morning."

An hour later, I received a telegram, signed by Monsignor Antoniutti, the Apostolic Delegate, announcing my appointment.

The fact was, no doubt, that our kindly Delegate, on making his routine report to the Sovereign Pontiff at the conclusion of his airplane travels, in his admiration for the missionaries of the six vicariates must have solicited a public token of satisfaction on the part of the Holy See. Without being any more deserving than my brethren in the apostolate, it was I who received this testimonial.

39: *A Retreat · Sale of the “Bellanca”*



I HAD DECIDED to preach the annual retreat in the nine chief centers of my vicariate. This would mean traveling five thousand miles in midwinter, with our *Bellanca* or *Sancta Maria*. We were joined at Aklavik by Father Binamé of the Paulaktuk mission. The account he gave of his own trip to join us deserves reproducing:

“Between rosaries, which take the place of my breviary, I was surprised to find myself singing. The weather was fine and the days were getting longer. My dogs, going at a swift trot, had already covered about 60 of the 171 miles which separates me from my neighbors on Anderson River (Stanton).

“It was getting late, and time to camp. I pitched my tent, had a light supper, said my prayers (too short), and went to sleep at the foot of the mountains on the shores of Franklin Bay.

“Awakened by the wind, I made ready to start. But by the time I had tied up my baggage the wind, already violent, had increased in strength a hundredfold, and so suddenly that dogs, sled and driver were momentarily swept away on the ice, which previous hurricanes had polished like glass. One would have said that Aeolus, ambushed in the mountains, had been waiting for me to start as a signal to launch an all-out attack. It was impossible to stand upright. Bent double to the ground, I tried to struggle on. My leader was performing prodigies of valor, but the two young dogs behind him just lay down terrified.

“After countless vain attempts, I got back on my course and much against my will proceeded to anchor my sled which declined to stay put. What was to be done now? An igloo? Out of the question. The snow was too hard—just like ice. Pitch my

tent again, or at least make a shot at it? If I opened my sled the contents would soon take wing. However, I unlaced it enough to extract my camp bed, tied up the rest and crawled into my sleeping bag, fully dressed, beside my sled. Meanwhile the hurricane vented its wrath upon the pygmy that had thought to brave it. In spite of all my efforts my bed got full of snow . . . Altogether it was a poor show and it might go on for two or three days or even more. . . .

"But no — after six hours there came a calm. I leaped up. To fix my triangular tent took me only a few seconds. Quite near, north and south, the hurricane still raged, only a few hundred yards away. Here there was a momentary eddy . . . but, quick. The whirlwind was drawing nearer again. There! My tent was up and well anchored. The hurricane was upon me again . . . but this time it was too late. My bed was wet with melted snow, but when sleeping fully dressed one retains a certain amount of animal heat. And I had three caribou tongues, one of which I was already holding in my mouth like a cigar, while I knelt in my little shelter and shook out of my bed as much snow as possible. After that I slept peacefully.

"I awoke to find myself considerably weighed down. The fact was, I was buried. . . . There was a sudden cracking sound, right underneath me. I quickly disengaged myself and was out in a single bound. The ice had broken, and there was the sea yawning open only a hundred yards away, but the block I was on held firm. . . . I should have to go by land. The storm appeared to be subsiding somewhat. I could almost stand upright, so off I set.

"I was now in completely unknown territory. . . . Rocks of all shapes grated against my sled, at first little pieces, then great chunks. The bare bolts scraped upon the frozen snow like a rake, greatly slowing down my progress. There was no more ice in sight. After fifteen long miles I camped for the night. Would my sled stand up to this sort of game? Night counseled me, and I went to sleep to the sound of the waves.

"I had covered about eighty miles. But I now had to make a half-turn and change my equipment. By the time I got back to Paulaktuk (Letty Harbor) my runners were making contact only

here and there. A rest, a cleanup and a bit of patching were needed.

"I set off again, my sled now equipped with iron runners. I would get through, whatever happened. The bay had frozen over again. The wind was behind me. Risking the thin ice, I reached Horton River, the first Eskimo camp. There, an exchange of news, and a day's holiday for my dogs.

"In the evening, I received a letter by sled from Father L'Helgouach at Stanton, dated January 19. He was going to wait for me till February 5, when he would be off to meet Monseigneur at Aklavik, whither I too was summoned. The irony of it! I received the letter on the 5th, at midnight.

"Next day, I made forty miles, then camped. The following day I reached Stanton, to find that Father L'Helgouach had in fact left on the 5th.

"Father Léonce Dehurtevent had been left on his own, and I spent two days with him, planning the remaining stages of my journey. It was possible I might overtake the Father, who would surely stay a day or two with his good neighbor Father Franche, all alone at Tuktukeyaktuk. The orders from Monseigneur, which reached me here, were clear enough. I must do everything possible to be present at the retreat.

"Off again. I had to get to Tuktukeyaktuk by the surest and shortest way — which was, of course, the one I didn't know. How cold it was, crossing the Eskimo lakes!

"I was traveling in unknown country, by compass. I had to shield my glasses from the snow and keep cleaning my precious compass which was covered with frost and froze constantly. A biting wind nipped my nose. Camping that evening, I experienced again all those icy kisses; my long ears, my famous nose, my face, all smarted as they thawed. In the afternoon of the third day I reached an Eskimo camp. No one seemed to recognize me.

"‘Are you the one who travels by boat?’

"‘Yes.’

"‘Why, you’ve grown old. How did you come, all this way . . . all alone?’

"‘With my dogs.’

"It was still ten miles to Tuktukyaktuk, but I reached it that evening. Because of the bad weather, the two Fathers had not yet left. A day's rest and a powwow, in the course of which Hitler and Stalin both had their necks wrung, and we were away again. By sure little stages we arrived at Aklavik a day before Monseigneur's plane.

"It was exactly a month after my first attempt to start on my journey that my companions and I went into retreat, the aim and object of that 500 mile trip. It was delightful enjoying community life again, warmed by Father Trocellier's affectionate hospitality and the charming friendliness of both young and old. It certainly revived my ardor."

On the same day that the Providence retreat ended I went to Edmonton to be treated for a malignant varicose growth. Bishop Fallaize having left for France, I asked the Holy See for a new coadjutor, who was to be Father Joseph Trocellier, founder and superior of Aklavik.

And now a complication occurred. For various reasons the war made it necessary to sell our plane, and after several approaches by Father Serrurot, our procurator, the President of Canadian Airways, Punch Dickens, then short of planes, showed himself eager to acquire her at a price that was very advantageous to us.

Here I would like to express my deep and lively gratitude to our beloved pilot Louis Bisson in the name of all our missionaries. We all appreciated his delightful character, his skill and his unselfish devotion to our missions. May God repay him the debt of gratitude we owe, as He visibly protected him in all his dangerous flights during the war, when he transported numerous bombers from Canada to England, and conveyed to many different posts of the world some of the most important personages of the British Empire, such as Eden, Bevin and Lord Mountbatten.

For his outstanding services, he was decorated by the Pope with the cross *Pro Pontifice et Ecclesia*, and by King George VI with the Order of the British Empire.

40: *My Resignation*

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SUFFERING from nerves and heart, I was sent for a rest to the seaside at Sooke, twenty-five miles from Victoria. During my stay there I met, most providentially, a very charitable benefactress who provided me with the means to build a new school at Fort Chipewyan. The old one had for some years been threatening to collapse and we lacked the funds to replace it.

In May, 1941, I was allowed by Dr. Blais to return to the North. A boatbuilder at McMurray offered me at a very reasonable price a vessel that would be simply ideal for us. Our *Guy* was not stout enough. The new boat, with its 120 horsepower engine, would do wonderfully. The bargain was concluded and the builder undertook to deliver the craft at the foot of the Fort Smith rapids. On July 28, 1941, I dispatched the following circular to my missionaries:

"I have not been back among you for nearly two months. I have had to forego the pleasure of coming to see you, as in former years, and have left the making of the annual visit to my coadjutor. It has, however, been a great consolation to feel I was near you. As your old Father, if I obeyed only the wishes of my heart, I would not hesitate to prolong my stay and spend the winter in the vicariate.

"But it would seem to be God's will that I make this sacrifice and leave you in a few days. I have not regained anything like enough strength to resume my regular labors. New crises are constantly recurring and I find myself obliged to stop and take a rest. If I go on like this, I run the risk of a relapse from which it would doubtless prove very much harder to recover. Also I am

so anxious to be able to visit all our missions, and see you again, next year, on the occasion of my double jubilee as priest and bishop, that I have decided to return south in a fortnight's time.

"Apart from this, I have to complete the preparations for beginning work on our new school at Chipewyan, in the spring of 1942. I have also to take the necessary steps to hasten the building of a new vessel to take the place of the *Our Lady of Lourdes*, which is now too small for us. The craft we have in mind will be built according to the plans of the *Nigalik*, and to the same dimensions.

"There are also a number of matters I have to discuss with the Apostolic Delegate, and with the government at Ottawa. Then there will be the celebrations of the centenary of the Oblates' arrival in Canada. As dean of the Oblate bishops, I could hardly be absent from these. Between times I shall resume my treatment and rest cure.

"Whether it will be necessary to remain away all the winter will depend on circumstances. You will be notified about this by the first mail in December."

Such was my program when I left Fort Smith on August 8, and it was carried out point by point. I spent two most pleasant months in the solitude of the Laurentians, on the shores of the beautiful Lake Simon, enjoying gracious and generous hospitality.

April 6, 1942, marked the fortieth anniversary of my consecration. It was celebrated quietly with a simple low Mass in the chapel of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Angels, at Loreto Hall. The banquet in the hall itself, with lights, garlands of flowers and the most delicate of dishes, was a more public affair. Among the guests present were Bishop Cody of Victoria, and Bishop Crimont, S.J., vicar apostolic of Alaska. There were also celebrations at each one of our missions.

But the pitcher had gone so often to the well that it was now near breaking. Feeling at the end of my tether, I wrote from Fort Smith, on September 4, to Monseigneur Ildebrando Antoniutti, the Apostolic Delegate in Canada:

"Venerable and dear Excellency: After long reflection and prayer, I feel in conscience bound to request respectfully that you be good enough to submit to the Holy See my resignation of the apostolic vicariate of Mackenzie, and this for the following reasons:

"In spite of all the compliments paid me at my jubilee, the fact remains that I have reached the age of 75 years, 50 of which I have spent in the missions of the North, 40 with the cares and responsibilities of the episcopacy in the founding and organizing of a vicariate. Whether I have always worked with the energy and tenacity of will which the circumstances required — *est qui judicat*.

"As an extenuating circumstance I may urge that for fifty-five years I have suffered from an exhaustion, or very marked debility, of the nervous system. My theological studies suffered from this, so that for 18 months I was unable to take the regular course of studies. It was only by sheer will power, visibly inspired and sustained by grace, that I was able to go on working for ten years as a simple missionary in the solitude of Fond du Lac, and then for forty as a bishop.

"More than 15 years ago, doctors in France and Canada advised me most strongly to leave the North, where the climate had become too much for me owing to *angina pectoris*.

"In 1923, and for the four following years, I had to take a course of treatment in France, to tone up my nervous system which was so completely debilitated that it was generally thought I should never get over it. It was then that the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda appointed for the vicariate a temporary administrator with full powers and responsibility.

"Since then, never completely restored to health, I have been obliged to follow every visit to my missions with a more or less lengthy rest, always distressing to me because it deprived me of the personal contact I had always maintained with my missionaries and which at all times had been a source of my dearest consolations.

"I should add that the arrival of thousands of Americans, with



all their formidable equipment, to develop our oil and mineral resources, construct roads, aerodromes, etc. is beginning to effect a complete revolution in the Mackenzie district.

"More than ever, he who has the prime responsibility should be on the spot, to keep the situation under control, and take the immediate decisions required by the unforeseen elements in so extensive a development, which in a few years will utterly change the whole face of the Mackenzie.

"Really it needs a younger and steadier head than mine, and more active legs too, to deal with not only the old problems, but all the new ones which soon will be mounting up.

"These, Venerable Excellency, are the considerations which, before God, have induced me to request from the Holy See authorization to transfer to my young coadjutor, who has already given brilliant proof of his ability, the full administration of the Mackenzie vicariate, with complete responsibility for its administration. Greater freedom of movement will allow him to work to the full measure of his capacity. Our various undertakings cannot fail to benefit, for the honor of the Church and of the Oblate Congregation.

"For my part, after the extremely active life that has been mine for the last fifty years, I feel more and more a pressing need for solitude and recollection, in order to make ready to account to the Master for that part of His vineyard which, in His infinite mercy, He deigned to entrust to my care.

"Now that in discharge of my duty to conscience and God I have made known the feeble state of my health and the extent to which age and infirmity have made me unequal to my task, I await with calm and confidence the decision of the Holy See, with whom it lies to show me God's will, to which now and always my answer is *Fiat*.

"Thanking your Most Reverend Excellency beforehand, I beg you to accept once more the assurance of my affectionate respect and devotion . . ."

The Apostolic Delegate was far from approving of this step.

"However," he assured me some weeks later at Ottawa, "I have sent your letter to Rome. You will receive from the Holy See fresh encouragement and a new blessing, but don't expect anything else. The Mackenzie vicariate still needs your presence. You've got a coadjutor: make him work."

"My coadjutor does the work," I agreed, "but it is I who keep the responsibility. This burden of responsibility is increasing all the time, and it is that that's killing me."

"You are wrong to take it to heart so," he urged. "You haven't grasped the intention of the Holy See in giving you a coadjutor."

"And what was that?" I asked.

"That you should leave as much as possible to him. His responsibility lies in the way he carries out your directions; your own is confined entirely to the directions you give. The less you concern yourself with details, the less your responsibility."

"I must admit, Excellency," I said, "that I had never thought of it like that. I promise to bear it in mind."

A few days later, seeing His Excellency again, I thanked him afresh and added:

"I have made Bishop Trocellier provicar and invested him with all my powers. I gave him only one directive, for which I take full responsibility."

"And what was that?" he asked.

"Do your best!"

"Excellent!" the Delegate replied. "Now you can set your mind at ease and take all the rest you need."

Winter found me in British Columbia where I enjoyed a peaceful Christmas as the guest of my medical adviser, Dr. (now Senator) Blais.

And now a letter arrived by airmail from Cardinal Fumasoni Biondi, Prefect of Propaganda:

"Rome, January 12, 1943

"Most Reverend Dear Sir, His Excellency the Apostolic Dele-

gate of Canada has notified the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda that your state of health, after fifty years of missionary apostolate in the harshest missions in the world, is now much enfeebled and that you wish to transfer to your Right Reverend Coadjutor the administration of your apostolic vicariate.

"The Sacred Congregation took your request into serious consideration and after weighing it well decided to refer it to His Holiness Pius XII. This was done on the 7th of this month.

"His Holiness was pleased to refer to Your Excellency's missionary achievements and praised them most highly, recalling in this connection the marks of special affection which these have won you in the past from the Holy See. Nevertheless, since ill-health and fairly advanced age have much diminished your strength, he gladly deigns to accede to your wish and accept your resignation, at the same time according Your Excellency, most affectionately, a very special apostolic benediction.

"Consequently you may, when you think fit, hand over to your coadjutor the administration of the apostolic vicariate which you have been ruling up to now. Our Sacred Congregation, likewise, begs to express most warmly its gratitude and admiration for all the labors you have undergone, both as missionary and vicar apostolic during your forty years at the head of your missions, and for the works you have begun and accomplished for the good of souls. It wishes you most heartily the higher rewards of Almighty God, both now and in eternity.

"I take the opportunity to send all my best wishes, happy to be, Your Excellency, Yours very devotedly in Our Lord, P. Card. FUMASONI BIONDI, praef., Celsus Constantini, Secretary."

This acceptance of my resignation, though it was what I myself had asked for, came like a blow with a sledge hammer. I asked my coadjutor, Bishop Trocellier, to come and see me. After his visit, I wrote to my missionaries, on April 6, as follows:

"On this 41st anniversary of my episcopal consecration, I have to announce, not without deep sadness of heart, that I am no longer your vicar apostolic. This very day, by the authority of the Holy See, His Excellency, Bishop Joseph Trocellier, who for

three years has been carrying out so devotedly and to the satisfaction of all the function of coadjutor, takes official charge of the Mackenzie vicariate, with full powers to administer it on his personal responsibility. May God assist him and enable him for many long years to enjoy your filial affection.

"For three years now my poor nervous system has been more or less on strike, preventing me from fulfilling my duties satisfactorily. I have tried in vain to set it up again. In addition to this, the arrival of so many strangers, come to exploit the wealth of the North, has given rise to new problems almost everywhere. The administration of the vicariate has therefore grown more complicated. The truth is, I feel I have no longer the physical or the moral strength to retain control of the vicariate and discharge as I should the obligations this involves.

"You may be sure it is not without deep emotion that I see the severing of those tender bonds which have united us for forty years. It is for us to see that they are not severed completely. We shall preserve unabated the mutual affection we have always felt. If, in your filial piety, you think you owe me any gratitude, you can be assured I shall never lose sight of the debt which I owe you, for your true Oblate zeal among my flock, your devotion and charity towards my humble person, as well as your generous and unwearied cooperation in the founding and development of our grand undertakings.

"May the Sacred Heart, to whom I shall always commend you in my prayers, deign to reward you with all the munificence of his love, and make fruitful, to the full measure of his own desires, your zeal in making Him always better known, and always better loved, *usque ad extremum terrae.*"

One of our best missionaries in the Eskimo country, Father Roger Buliard, founder of the mission of Christ the King in Victoria Land, wrote to me as follows when he heard of my retirement:

"The mission of Christ the King is your Benjamin. God has not permitted you to carry out other plans you had in mind, as

if his intention was that this mission should remain your *Nunc dimittis* . . . once you had realized the wishes of the Master and of the Sovereign Pontiffs, who called you to bear the cross to the ends of the earth. Having reached this goal, could you go any further? Have you not fully lived up to your motto: *Peregrinari pro Christo?*"

The good Father was right. After having succeeded, in obedience to the vicar apostolic and thanks to the zeal of my missionaries, in founding a mission and setting up a tabernacle, humble though it was, at the very limit of the habitable "snow lands" in the north of the Mackenzie vicariate, might I not legitimately proclaim my joy and gratitude by intoning my *Nunc dimittis*?

I did so.

## Appendix I

### THE TINNEH-TINDJIE LANGUAGE

Languages are commonly divided into three groups:

- (a) monosyllabic;
- (b) agglutinative;
- (c) flexional.

To these there is often added, as it was by Father Petitot in his *Tinneh-Tindjie* dictionary,<sup>1</sup> a fourth group, that of the polysynthetic languages.

"Tinneh-Tindjie takes on a number of forms and has characteristics proper to all four of the above classifications.

"1. Like the monosyllabic languages — for instance Chinese — it has neither gender nor plural, and it expresses numbers by adverbs; e.g., *Tinneh*, a man; *Tinneh 'lan*, men, a number of men.

"2. Many verbs are formed in the simplest way conceivable; namely by placing together a personal pronoun and an adjective, without anything to connect them; e.g., *Sinniye*, 'I happy,' for 'I am happy.'

"3. The only difference between *Tinneh-Tindjie* and the flexional languages is that in the latter the inflexion occurs at the end of the verb in the form of a pronominal suffix, whereas in *Tinneh-Tindjie* the termination is the verbal root itself, which is almost always invariable, the inflexion taking place at the beginning of the verb as a personal prefix.

"4. I now come to the polysynthetic or American languages. These, it has been said, join a number of ideas in one long word, which is virtually a sentence. Certainly *Tinneh-Tindjie* forms many of its verbs by this process.

"Take the verb 'to love.' There are two words for this. The first and more common, when analyzed, means literally: 'I place my spirit near you' (*ranyenirer'an*: *ran*, near; *yeni*, my spirit; *rer'an*, I place).

<sup>1</sup> Father Petitot gives this name to his big dictionary in three dialects: Montagnais, Hare and Loucheux. *Tinneh* is Montagnais, *Tindjie*, Loucheux. They mean the same: "man *par excellence*" and describe the two tribes of the same racial family in the extreme south and north of the Mackenzie vicariate. Between them live the Slaveys, and the Hares, who call themselves *Tenneh*, *Tinneh* or *Tunneh*.

The second, more expressive, means on analysis: 'I push myself near you by desire' (*ran-da-reschie*: *ran*, near; *da*, by desire; *reschie*, I push or stretch myself)."

I have no wish to fatigue the reader with the rules of Montagnais grammar and syntax, but I think it would be interesting to give two or three examples of the richness of this tongue.

1. Take the verb *to be*. In the third person it is *enli*. Except when it is a question of something *existing*, it can hardly ever be employed without something to qualify it. It can never mean just "there is." A so-called "positional" verb must always be employed then, and it will vary according to the nature or position of the object. Hence a wealth of expressions:

*she'an*, something massive, like a rock

*shelshush*, something soft, like linen or paper

*shedzai*, something finely ground, like powder or flour

*shek'an*, anything resembling an empty vessel

*shelk'an*, a full one

*shet'an*, anything long, like a length of wood or iron

*shelt'an*, a bag full of salt or flour

If a man or animal is the subject, it is necessary to be more precise and use a verb to indicate his position. Thus:

*shedda*, he is seated

*sheyin*, he is standing

*shet'in*, he is lying down

*shelt'in*, he is dead (referring to the corpse)

These different endings must be used with all verbs of movement or transport.

2. The verb *to go* has to alter its ending according to its subject and the means of locomotion:

*essai*, "I go," is the verb generally used for a human being

*regal* is used for a man going on foot

*regol* for quadrupeds—all except the elk, an animal very highly esteemed by the Indians, and entitled to the same word used for human beings, *regal*

*rettal* is used for the movement of birds and airplanes

*eltla* for caribou. Also for a man when going quickly

The prefix *na* is then added to express repetition. The root of the verb is *ila*; *eltla* means "the behind"; so to walk quickly is to set in movement, to agitate the behind

*rek'odh* is used for objects like clouds, boats, etc.

*reddouzh* for something climbing

*edhi* for movements of the spirit

It should be noted that the use of these words is determined by fixed and exclusive rules. I remember once, in a sermon, urging my Indians who lived "in the blue" to make a spiritual visit to the Divine Host in the Tabernacle; but by a slip of the tongue I used for this movement of the spirit the word exclusively used for a man walking on foot. Immediately the image suggested to their minds was that of their spirit stepping out like a man; consequently they all burst out laughing, children included. The phrase I had used was so absurd that I myself couldn't help smiling. It was as though I had talked of caribou winging their way across the plains toward the mission.

3. Here is one last example to show how polysynthetic verbs are made up. In this case the root word is *tshen'l*, "an axe."

From this we can derive the following verbs:

*estshel*, to strike with the axe, set the axe in movement

*nastshel*, to cut a piece in two with the axe (here *na* means a piece)

*nadadestshel*, to cut into a number of pieces (*na*, piece; *da*, several)

*rastshel*, to square (*ra*, euphoniously, for *ran*, a part; I remove a part with the axe)

*kkestshel*, to fell a tree at any height (*kke*, completely)

*kkechineshshel*, I fell a tree at the base (*kke*, completely; *tchin*, base)

*elkkedestshel*, to fell trees one on top of the other (*elkke*, one on top of the other; *estshel*, to fell)





## *Appendix II*

### LETTER FROM HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XII

*The year 1952 brought the fiftieth anniversary of my episcopal consecration and His Holiness Pius XII was pleased to send me the following letter:*

To Our Venerable Brother Gabriel BREYNAT,  
Titular Archbishop of Garella,  
Assistant at the Pontifical Throne,  
PIUS XII, Pope

Venerable Brother,

We have received with a grateful heart your very kind letter in which you express to Us, at the beginning of this year, your good and pious wishes.

From this same letter We also learn with joy that soon you will be completing 60 years since your priestly ordination and, what is rare for Holy Pontiffs, the 50th anniversary of your episcopate.

For this you and your missionary companions especially have a double reason to rejoice and duly thank God. For when you consider these years that have gone by, your memory must surely recall the long apostolic labors you have endured, with your companions, in order to win for Christ souls so greatly forsaken and so remote from human society, in those vast frozen regions of Canada, where for 42 years you held the office and responsibility of vicar apostolic of Mackenzie.

What an example you have left to those happy messengers of the Gospel who, with so many others, are called to strange, hard and distant lands, there peacefully to promote the kingdom of God throughout the world.

We, therefore, who at the beginning of Our Pontificate, in recognition of your merits had the joy of promoting you to the archiepiscopal dignity, take this new occasion now offered Us to send you Our liveliest congratulations on your laborious ministry, and implore on your behalf an abundance of heavenly gifts and consolations.

In token of which now, and in testimony of Our special affection, We send most lovingly in the Lord, to you, Venerable Brother, and

to your companions in the missions, Oblates of the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculate, Our Apostolic Benediction.

Given at Rome, by St. Peter's, February 8 of the year 1952, the 13th year of Our Pontificate.

Signed: PIUS PP. XII.

*(The original in Latin.)*



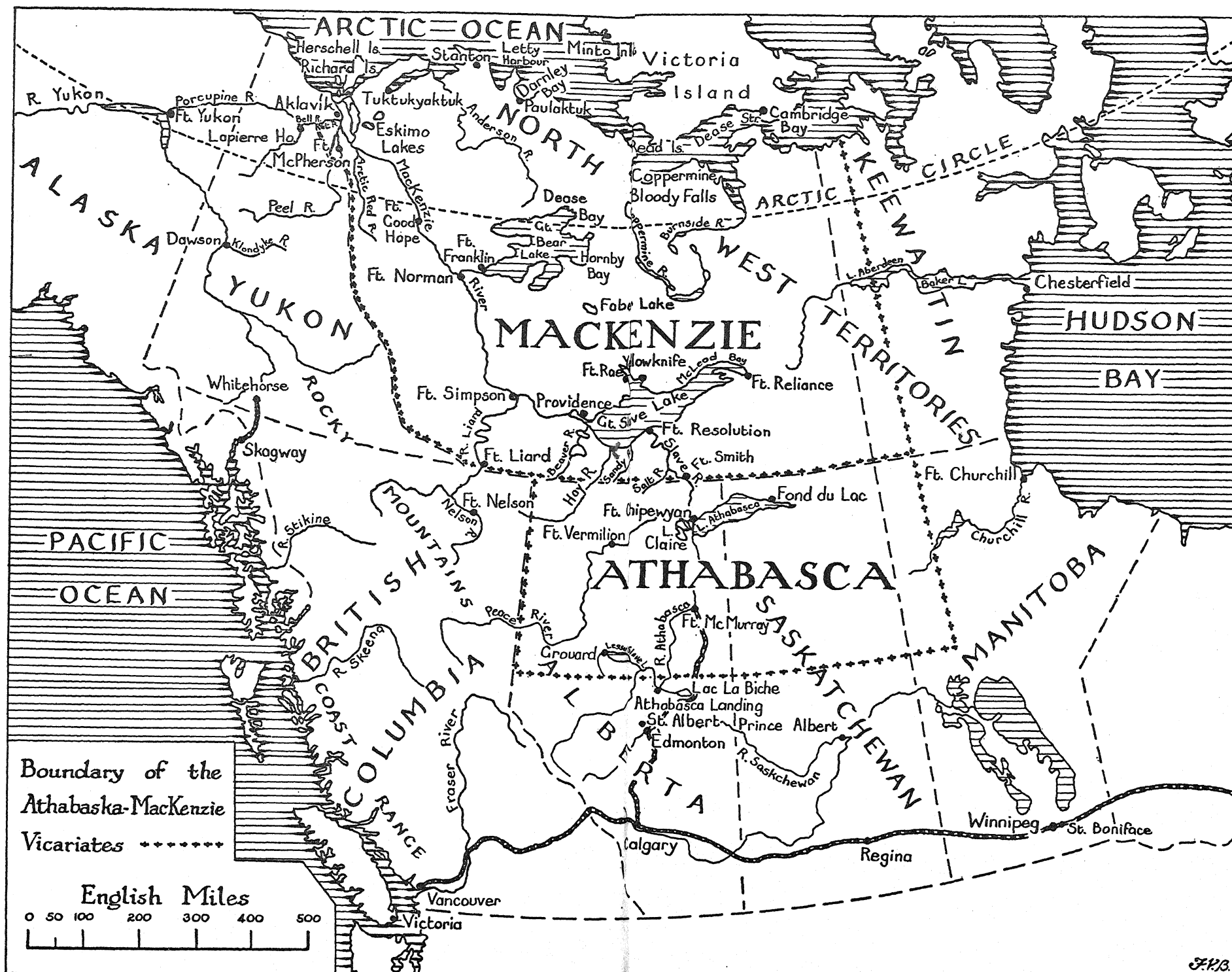












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